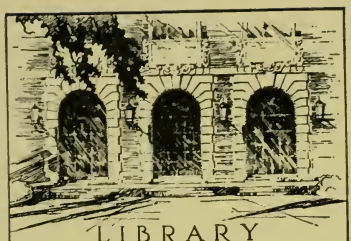

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# MIRIAM COPLEY.

BY

J. CORDY JEAFFRESON.

AUTHOR OF

"NOVELS AND NOVELISTS," "CREWE RISE,"

ETC., ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

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# MIRIAM COPLEY.

## CHAPTER I.

### MARRIED.

I REMAINED in Charles Millicent's chambers in New Inn for eight weeks, labouring under a nervous fever. During this period my host nursed me with the kindness a father exhibits to a sick child. He found a bed for himself in an adjoining house, and gave up to my sole use his two apartments. He procured for me the best of medical advice, and lavished upon me all those luxuries of diet and attention, which alone can render easy an invalid's return to health.

When I was capable of a little exertion, and was in a state that permitted of my being safely removed from New Inn, I was conveyed to a cottage in a secluded village near Richmond, where Charles Millicent had procured a temporary home for me, in which I might at my leisure resume my strength and good looks.

Had Mr. Millicent confined his benevolence to providing for me the mere necessaries of life, I should have been very grateful and have highly estimated such charity; for I soon learnt he was a poor man, living from hand to mouth by journalism, and without any secure position in that most arduous and most uncertain of professions—literature. But to the good deeds he did me, he added extreme delicacy in the manner of doing them. Such kindness would have made an impression on a heart of stone; and I, so long inured to harshness and insult, was softened and subdued by it.

By the summer I was as strong as ever.

My vigorous constitution enabled me to throw off the fetters of weakness and disease; my locks were fast growing thick again; and soon I began once more to debate on what course I ought to pursue to get on in life. Melton Stubbs, Aldeburgh, Caroline Ufford, Portland Place,—these were the sign-posts on the road I had traversed;—what names would mark the milestones on the route yet to be travelled over?

I was still an inmate of the cottage near Richmond, and, after a toilet of more than usual length and care, I was sitting in my little drawing-room, glancing every now and then approvingly at my image in the mirror, and listening anxiously for the step and ring of an expected visitor. It was July, and through the open window I had a lovely prospect of some sloping pasturage, dotted with oxen and sheep, in the foreground, and, in the distance, a glimpse of Father Thames, and a line of richly-wooded hills.

At last the ring and knock came, and in

another minute Charles Millicent entered the room. Like myself, he was better dressed than was his use; and there was a flush in his pale face, and a quickly-wandering light in his peculiar eyes, that indicated he was bent on some important object. He sat down, and recounted the events of the few preceding days,—what friends he had seen, what books he reviewed, where he had dined. And I laughed at a story he told me of an accident that had taken place in the Opera House, the night before; but, though I laughed, I was impatient with him for not coming to the business which instinct told me he had at heart.

"When you entered, Mr. Millicent," I said, when we had become graver, "I was thinking of the old question—which we have already discussed."

"Oh!—let that rest. Time enough to settle that weeks hence."

"I think," answered I, deliberately, "it is a subject on which we should not procrasti-

nate. I may not continue to be your guest any longer. The benefits you have already conferred on me will always be reflected on by me with pleasure, for they have been nobly given, even as they will always be gratefully acknowledged: but they must cease now, or otherwise your goodness will be burdensome alike to me and to yourself. For you are poor, and—I am proud."

"You don't reproach me with having helped you?"

"For shame! Nonsense!"

"I am afraid that for that very reason I stand less favourably with you than I should have—I mean, than I could wish."

"In other words, you believe that I am ungrateful."

"No. But, as you confessed just now, you are proud; and if I preferred to you a great petition—an earnest request for the most valuable gift you have it in your power to bestow—you would resent my conduct, though you would be gratified—certainly not dis-

pleased—by the same entreaty coming from the lips of any other man. You would say, 'This man over-estimates the claim and hold he has upon me; he presumes too much on the intimacy which painful circumstances—and not his good qualities—have created between us.'"

"Is it," I asked reproachfully, "because you have so much generosity, that you give me credit for having so little?"

"Miriam, I beg your pardon. Don't be angry with me. If I am awkward, and cannot say what I want clearly and delicately, I am powerless to do so, not because I have a selfish dread of sacrificing my own interests and lessening my power over you, but because I am afraid of hurting your feelings, by placing you between the two painful alternatives, of granting my request without the full consent of your heart, or of refusing it—and cruelly wounding a man whom, I am sure, you do not wish to pain. I want,—by heavens, you know what I want!"

I was much agitated, and the tears were on

the point of starting into my eyes; but I could not help smiling as he clutched my hand with a grip that would have bent a poker, and alternately stammered and was silent.

On such occasions, we women have more self-command than men. Calling up all my energies to my assistance, I replied,—

"Have you well thought, Mr. Millicent, on what you are asking? Of course you have spent time and anxiety enough in debating what my feelings towards you may be; but have you given sufficient weight to prudential considerations? The man who marries me defies the world's prejudices in more than one respect, and must necessarily often have painful conflicts with the mean and pitiful sentiments of those whom he opposes. You are my benefactor; and it would ill beseem me to requite you for your unspeakable kindness by bringing shame and contention into your life."

"You do not love me, then?" he cried, looking, as he exclaimed the words, so terrible in his agitation that I feared the anxiety of

the crisis might bring about a sudden revulsion of feeling, and he should reject me.

It was no time for trifling.

"Charles Millicent," I answered, in that soft, solemn tone with which in my childhood I had charmed my poor father, "if I did not love you, how could I say to you, I will be your wife?"

"What! you do say it?" he exclaimed.

"Yes, Charles Millicent, I will be your wife. And may God help me to be to you the good wife I purpose being! May He keep alive in me all the better feelings which now rule my heart and actuate me! May he enable me so to order my life that I may become a useful, good woman,—a source of happiness to you, and an instrument of good to others."

I could say no more, though my prayer was scarce begun. The memories of all my good resolves broken flitted,—a mocking crowd,—before me, and a gloomy presentiment that years hence the same shadowy multitude would dance before me in increased numbers,

stopped my utterance and overpowered me. I begged Charles Millicent to leave me,—to depart for the present, and let me have till the following day to recover my equanimity; and when he had complied, and after covering me with manly expressions of tenderness, had disappeared from the scene, I passed long hours in solitude, supplicating God in the agony of my mind, and pouring forth, at the Divine seat, every form and ingenious variety of entreaty by which a poor, timid, frightened mortal could hope to influence the purposes of the Unchangeable One. And ever amidst my prayers the image of Caroline Ufford rose before me, and stimulated me to implore, with increased fervour, the protection of our Heavenly Father. That night, too, when I laid my aching head on my pillow, her image remained by my side, and I thought,—those old, old thoughts that so often perplexed and disturbed me,—of the difference between us, of the impossibility of my ever attaining to her goodness, and whether, if my childhood

had, like hers, been blessed with affectionate tending and gentle nurture, I might have been like her—strong in mercy and charity and all Christian goodness. And I communed with myself in the darkness, brooding over the mysterious expectations of the future :—"If ever I have children to love me, and to love, the recollection of my own first errors and sufferings will teach me how to guard their spring-time of life from those evils which have tainted all my own days."

But these harrowing feelings were not of long duration.

Our engagement was not a long one. We were married in the month of August, in the presence of one of Charles's literary friends, who, together with his young wife (a pretty girl—the daughter of an actress), came to witness, and testify in the parish register to, the performance of the ceremony, in the quiet church of the little village near Richmond. Our honeymoon was spent in a trip to Paris. It was not so much the fashion then as now

for English people to visit the Continent; and to me the excitement of my first excursion to the French capital consisted in no slight degree of a sensation that I was making an adventure which, apart from its immediate pleasantness, would give me a certain prestige in society.

We amused ourselves in Paris much as English people have been accustomed to amuse themselves there for upwards of a century. We visited all the churches and theatres in succession, listened to the operatic Prima Donnas of the day, criticised the new *danseuse*, made gastronomic experiments at all the most celebrated dining-places, gambled a little at the Palais Royal, drove in the Champs Elysées, and once or twice attended Mass, before going to the Art Galleries of the Louvre. Charles was flush and triumphant with a sudden influx of money, having sold "The Demireps, a Three Act Comedy," to a London manager for 400*l.*, and got 100*l.* from the *Edinburgh Review* for his two

articles on "Moral Philosophy" and "The Influence of Religion on National Character." Like a true Bohemian of the quill, he was compelled to scatter his money freely; and he did so—on pursuits almost as opposite and varied as those from which he had gained the cash.

Long ere he had married me, I had ceased to be surprised at any inconsistency in his conduct. His appearance on a stool as a street-preacher, and his subsequent frank avowal of how little his life accorded with Christian precepts, were genuine expressions of his nature and habits. Impulsive and fickle, he was always in pursuit of some object, and always changing the object of his pursuit. He was quick in perception, and with his tongue or pen was a powerful reasoner; but he was utterly devoid of principle, and was incapable of entertaining a lasting conviction on any subject. He was as inconsistent as he was changeable. You never knew where you had him, or where you might

expect to find him. One three months of the year he'd be a Tory in politics, and another three months a Whig; and he would complete the annual cycle by a burst of Socialism. He shifted from humanitarian sentimentalism to a cynical disregard of human suffering, quicker than the most alert time-server could discern a whale's semblance in a fleece of vapour. In January he'd be the enthusiastic admirer of a new pulpit orator; in June he'd be advocating the speedy abolition of all sacerdotal systems. The moral of his life was—"All things are equally good—all equally bad;" but he never enforced this doctrine in a *nil admirari* strain, but by working away with a mad impetuosity, first in one direction, and then in another. In a certain sense, he was an honest man, as are winds and multitudes and other powers whose nature it is to chop and change.

At Paris the humour of the moment was to fling himself into the current of life, and

disport himself in it, to abandon himself to merriment, to be gay and light-hearted as a Frenchman, or rather as an Englishman when he has left his country behind him. He laughed, jested, and sought pleasure with the same extravagance as he had six months before displayed in preaching and praying.

"Bravo! good! thrice good!" exclaimed my husband, springing with a bound into the *salon* of our apartments in the Rue de la Madeleine, "two magnificent pieces of intelligence! I have met an old friend of yours, and he inquired after you, and implores our company to dine with a very pleasant party at his hotel this evening."

"Who can he be?"

"My old college friend, Rawleigh Ufford!"

"Indeed!" said I, blushing with excitement, but with natural hypocrisy turning away from the subject of interest—"and what is the other news?"

"Lord Cheveley is dead."

"Dead!"

"Ay—he died just a fortnight since. His demise was announced in the papers on our wedding-day, when I had other things to do besides examining the columns of the journals for the latest news. That's how we came not to have heard of it before this."

"Then Mr. Ufford will one day be Lord Ufford?"

"Exactly so. The Earldom of Linton-Stetchworth will become extinct, but the old barony will descend to Rawleigh, with the entailed estate of 6,000*l.* a-year. And it cannot be doubted but that his iniquitous old reprobate of an uncle will leave him, as the representative of his family, the great wealth of which he has the disposal. But, better than all expectations, Rawleigh has already come in for two thousand a-year."

"He'll now be able to marry Lady Cheveley," said I, with a derisive smile.

"Suggest the step to him this evening."

"We are going, then?"

"Assuredly."

"Oh! I did not know it was such a matter of course. Are the ladies we shall meet there of a kind you would like your wife to know?"

He knit his brows angrily, and curled his lip disdainfully at this manifestation on my part of a desire to consult for my own dignity and welfare; but, instead of saying anything irritable, he replied drily:—

"You need not fear that you'll be compromised. Possibly the characters of the ladies we shall spend this evening with would not bear a minute and censorious inspection, but you will find them agreeable people, I'll be bound, and all with fair reputations as far as 'society' is concerned."

I did not care to offer any opposition. Indeed I was well pleased with having the responsibility of deciding whether we should accept the invitation taken out of my hands; and though I felt it prudent, and indeed necessary and due to my position as a wife, to hint at my reluctance to form any dubious ac-

quaintances, I should have been cruelly mortified if Charles had not taken me to the dinner.

So we went.

Rawleigh Ufford, handsome as ever, although the first lines of advancing manhood had dissipated the round comeliness of his youthful appearance, received me with every cordial expression of welcome and enjoyment, at seeing me so well placed in life. Surrounded as he was by ladies of high rank and fashion, he payed me more marked attention than he did to any other of his guests. In his bearing to me there was no alloy of patronage, or amusement at my position. I was his *old* friend, acquainted with his home and early life. He inquired for Caroline, as, throwing his superb form back in his chair, he chatted with me after dinner in a subdued undertone, leaving his score of other companions to laugh and be merry after their own various fashions; and I noticed that when he spoke of his cousin a touch of sadness crossed

his face and changed his voice. I responded that she had not written to me for a long time, indeed only once since her marriage; and I had not been a better correspondent, for many obstacles had come in the way and prevented me from writing to her—sickness, and other difficulties.

With exquisite tact he feigned not to see my disturbance as the memory of *all* these difficulties occurred to me, and, without abruptly breaking away to another topic, he adroitly diverted my attention from that part of the one in hand which was causing me pain.

"Ay," said he, "we have quite lost sight of each other for some time. Only a few months since, possibly eight months, I was talking over old times with an intimate friend, who is good enough to execute all kinds of little commissions for me in England, and begged him to take all possible pains to find you out, and let me know at what place a letter would reach you."

"Indeed!" I answered, my eyes meanwhile flashing with pleasure, "did you indeed take so much trouble in the hopes of affording me happiness?"

"No, no," he replied, laughing, and lowering his voice, "I am not so benevolent as that. I wanted to add to the enjoyment of my own life."

"God bless you, Mr. Ufford! You were the first of human mould who seemed really to care for me; and though you have not seen me for years, and doubtless have not often thought of me, I have never said my prayers without saying as I do now—may God bless you!"

"Don't be so earnest, Miriam; I cannot bear it; it will kill me. If Aubrey could have found you out, such words might have been musical to me."

"Who? Aubrey?"

"Yes. Have I frightened you? That name can be nothing to you."

"'Tis the name of your old servant, Ste-

phen Watson, whom it is your fancy now to treat as a friend."

He laughed, "Ha! ha! You always disliked him, and expressed a strong aversion for him; but, strange to say, he always entertained cordial good-will towards you. When I begged him to hunt England through for you, and bring you to me at any cost, he displayed a zeal in endeavouring to execute my order which would have won your approbation. I cannot imagine how it is you came to miss his search."

"Rawleigh Ufford," I asked solemnly, "in the name of God, tell me what you wanted me for?"

Possibly the solemnity of my low voice, whispering amidst the mirth of the *salon*, in which music, and wit, and cards were creating a noisy excitement, or an expression of perilous earnestness in my countenance, alarmed my companion, and made him afraid to answer me candidly.

"Miriam, my beautiful child," he mur-

mured with entrancing softness, "don't let us talk of the past, or think of the future; and, for the present, let us continue to keep apart as much as possible. So, we shall both of us have the best chance of happiness,—at least, be most secure from incurable misery."

He left me; and, buoyantly responding to the persiflage of a piquant girl who assailed him with a charge of being a bad host, he crossed the room to a card-table, and was soon taking his part with the players. As for me, I sat in the corner, where he had left me, and, rousing myself every now and then to give suitable answers to the pert dandies who, from time to time, broke in on my solitude with undesired homage, I watched him, reclining on a lounge by the card-table, in all the royal grandeur of his loveliness, throwing his cards and mother-of-pearl counters over the red cloth, joining in a distant conversation with a felicitous *bon mot*, smiling acknowledgments to praise, and cleverly tickling the

self-love of every one present with delicate compliments.

"Come, dear, we must be off," said my husband's voice behind me. "We had better be off. Ufford is going to the ballet at the 'Comique' with the Comtesse de Boussetage."

"Have you enjoyed yourself, Charles?" I asked, as soon as we were seated in our carriage.

"Gloriously! A man who is Rawleigh's guest is sure to enjoy himself. And such luck as I have had makes card-playing a better profession than literature."

"Was the play high?"

"Pretty well; I have won upwards of 150 louis."

That night was the first of my married life which I passed in sleeplessness and sorrow, lying still and feigning slumber, but contending with divers passions and perilous imaginations. I wondered whether Rawleigh Ufford knew of the ignominious punishment I had undergone; and, happily for my peace of mind,

I persuaded myself that he was ignorant of my disgrace,—that John Aubrey had had the mercy, or mere justice, to keep my secret to himself—and that the hero of my life thought of me, felt for me, *loved* me only as that strange, wayward child of wretchedness whom he had marvelled at for years.

I can assure my charitable sisters who are already condemning me for allowing my perverse mind to rest on a topic fraught with shame and destruction of self-respect, that I did not without a struggle give myself up to the worship of my old benefactor. I beg them to know, if they are not too virtuous to entertain compassion for the wretched, that I set my face resolutely against the temptation that hemmed me in on every side, and made all those resolutions which a prudent—I will not say a well-principled—woman would naturally form under such a difficulty. I called to mind the support and protection my husband had rendered me in my hour of need, the generosity he had displayed in disregarding

the brand of contempt which *he* at least knew had been burnt into me, and the delicate consideration which he had always shown to me amidst all the capricious and stormy outbreaks of his impetuous nature. All this I summed up; and, in addition to these items in the debt of gratitude I owed to Charles Millicent, I piled upon the account the numerous and potent considerations of womanly honour, womanly duty, womanly dignity, which never have so vigorous a hold upon a wife as when Satan is alluring her to throw them to the winds. "Courage! Courage! Miriam Millicent! Have you never tasted grief, that you must flinch like a coward from the thought of having it stalk by your side, a companion all your days, Miriam Millicent?" And, so saying, I looked out at the grey dawn, and then pitying Nature closed my eyes, and let me sink into sleep.

It relieved me to learn the next day that Rawleigh Ufford had left Paris, and would not return for a month; for the wish that lay

nearest to my heart was that I might never see him again.

Our sojourn at Paris came to an end; and we re-crossed the Channel, and posted from Dover up to town.

My husband was in the highest spirits. The year had been a very lucky one to him, bringing in large returns of reputation and money. It seemed that by a sudden turn of fortune he had arrived at permanent success, and would soon achieve the ambition of his heart. Instead of going back to the dingy chambers in New Inn, we drove to a house in a fashionable street in May-fair, in which a fine suite of furnished apartments had been engaged for us; and the next day we were busy sending out notes to summon friends around us, and discussing our plans for the future.

Charles Millicent had spent so many years of his life as an author in London, and had been concerned with so many people in the course of his profession, that he necessarily had a large circle of acquaintance. Magazines,

political journals, comic papers, he and his companions had started by the scores. Somehow or other they had all been failures, and had sucked up in the aggregate a prodigious quantity of capital, supplied by simple-minded young gentlemen, ambitious of squandering their fortunes on bad literary speculations. After the principal conspirators (*promoters* it was their humour to term themselves) in these hazardous undertakings had settled on the form and title of their new venture, and had drawn up a prospectus for the public, showing how certain influential classes had manifested a desire for a certain particular kind of literature, &c., &c., the regular question, propounded with naïve sprightliness, was, "Well, and, now the other preliminaries are settled, where's the fool who is *to bleed* for all this?" "Oh," the general voice would answer, "that will be easy enough. We must advertize in *The Times* for a capitalist who combines wealth with mental culture, and, in the meantime, filter the Reform Club, and look out for a dis-

appointed member of the House of Commons." And this mode of treatment would always succeed. It was a boast of my husband's that, besides originating two minor theatres, and organizing five distinct companies of provincial actors, he had started twenty-eight unsuccessful papers. "These failures are sad things for the poor capitalists, but the reverse for me. I have lived by them for eighteen years," observed one of Charles's friends to me, with a statistical frankness that not a little amused me.

Immediately on our return from the Continent, my husband took measures to start a new political and literary review, that should commence with the opening of the next year, and electrify all the educated people of the kingdom. This time he was sure of success, indeed, so confident of it, that he was determined on being sole proprietor, as well as editor, of the affair. Long experience of the country had taught him thoroughly how it was to be hunted; and when he had once got

his pack together, he would have such runs as no meet had ever had before. As for money, he was admirably mounted—no clay would be too stiff for him, and he would take timber and water in a style unprecedented. Safe from all immediate calls, he had 2,000*l.* in hand (1,200*l.* he had won at play during the last Paris fortnight); Rawleigh Ufford, to whom he had communicated his scheme, had engaged to be good, if need required him to be so, for another 2,000*l.*; and that miserable little pink-eyed ferret, Lord Albatross, who positively hoped to wriggle his way into a Cabinet, could be sucked to the amount of another 3,000*l.* By the most sublime Cupid, Charles Millicent would make his game! He'd own the first newspaper in London, get into Parliament, and wrench a fat sinecure from the Administration!

"And you shall write on the paper, Miriam, with a salary of ten guineas a-week!" exclaimed my husband when he had given me a brilliant sketch of all his contemplated operations.

I laughed, and inquired what department I was to have allotted to me on such liberal terms.

"The reviewing of the ladies' books. A woman can sting the female mind better than any man can. My dear, you'll see with your quick eye the vanities, and jealousies, and pitiful affectations of the creatures—and you'll treat them accordingly. Wont you, Miriam?"

"You propose a pleasant task to me. But what are to be the principles of your journal?"

"As few and as vague as possible. I am not so young as to commit myself to extreme views, and so have a host of bitter enemies and a legion of lukewarm friends. In politics, religion, science, art, I shall maintain a philosophic breadth of thought which will enable me to pick anybody's pocket."

"Then, for the forbidden word '*principles*,' let me substitute another. By what *means* do you hope to win the favour of the public?"

"By our name and deeds, to be sure. How

better? Our journal will be called the *Fire-fly*—an attractive name! And it shall dart first right and then left, whizzing terribly, and flashing with the brilliance of a fire-fly; but, in addition, it shall also sting like the wasp."

"And do you hope to tickle the public into humour by stinging it?"

"No—not by stinging *it*, but by stinging certain prominent individuals who command the general admiration, and, as a consequence, the general jealousy. Our plan will be to attack with every form of contemptuous sarcasm anyone who by intellect or moral worth may be deserving of respect. If a good poem appear we shall demonstrate that it is a mass of miserable sentimental balderdash, deriving its faint smack of merit from barefaced plagiarism. If a politician of known probity and unquestioned intellect arouse more attention than usual, it will be shown in our columns that he is a humbug, an inconsistent twaddler, a vainglorious charlatan. We shall affect, by turns,

sublime pity, amusement, and indignation with the stupidities, follies, and vices of society. No man shall have a good word from us. We shall praise no party, and, as a consequence, shall get credit for being *above* party influence instead of *below* it, and therefore, of course, too devoured with a zeal to expose shams to think for a moment of our own interests. We shall be against everyone, and our reward will be the benefit of having everyone against us. The venom of our antagonists will proclaim our power. At first, the organs of those we open our forces upon will maintain a lofty silence, will refuse 'to bandy personalities,' and will feign ignorance of our existence. But in six weeks their moral continence will be vanquished, and all the accumulated stores of their indignation, bursting down the barriers of prudence, will pour upon us. Then there'll be such a war of words! a newspaper war! Bravo!—that is our game. How the laboured attacks of our adversaries will puff and advertise us! If our fire is not returned as soon

as we wish, why, of course we shall have to pay some journal to abuse us. But that will be an expensive plan, and I trust we shall not be compelled to have recourse to it."

"But," I inquired, in my simplicity and astonishment at this new view of literature behind the scenes, "will all this noise indeed be so highly appreciated as you think? Surely educated people will not find such keen enjoyment in ridicule poured upon all the great and good men who have done the highest work of this generation, and whom they have learnt, from a long experience of their noble powers, to venerate. I cannot believe that the admirers of our statesmen, divines, poets, writers, and men of science will be so ready to pay you and your hirelings to traduce the men you cannot emulate. 'Tis impossible that you'll be allowed to rise to eminence by piling up and ascending such a mountain of dirt. No, if you would succeed, it must be by displaying true philosophic acumen in criticising the institutions, and

movements, and artistic productions, to which you direct your readers' attention. You must instruct their minds, not pander to their meanest passions."

"Pappah!" laughed my husband; "I never saw you look so handsome in all my life before! Your eyes flash, Miriam, brighter than ever my *Fire-fly* will. And the time was when I should have agreed with you, and when I raved in fine style about 'the beautiful' and 'the true,' the everlasting dignity of right, and the perishable nature of wrong; but, thank Heaven, these delusive fancies of my youth will never again make me dance after a Will-o'-the-Wisp. I am a practical man."

"I pray you not to be a mad one," I answered, kissing him, as every wife should kiss her husband when she tries to stop him in a fit of waywardness.

"You will acknowledge me to be no madman six months hence," he responded, with a laugh. "Don't continue in the mistake that

people are so anxious for the reputations of eminent men. The greater, and wiser, and more truly elevated a man is, the more pleased is the world to hear ill of him. Love of slander is not confined to old women over their teacups. A love of detraction is to the mass of educated and refined people just what a craving for gossip is to a coterie of village scandal-mongers."

"But," I answered, courageously holding my ground, although I shifted my form of attack, "how will you maintain such a dangerous position? To be the contemptuous censor of every expression of intellect is not an easy task, if you are anxious to keep people from substituting *contemptible* for *contemptuous*."

"Oh! 'tis easier than you think, my dear," was the response, made in a tone of much modesty and also with much cunning. "'Tis true, the members of my staff will be altogether the inferiors of the men they assume a judicial superiority over, and doubtless they'll

make tremendous blunders in dealing out their arrogant, self-sufficient nonsense. But then, that matters not. Who'll be the wiser? Not one reader in a thousand will be able to detect the blunders; and there's no one, even should he possess the sagacity, with the opportunity and authority to expose the block-head. The critic, like the pulpit-orator, has it all his own way. There's no one to put him down, and write 'ass' upon his fore-head. I have often thought a fine field for satiric journalism was open to any really clever fellows who started a critical paper criticising criticisms."

I laughed outright, in spite of my vexation. It was impossible for me to be otherwise than extremely amused with my husband's depth of scorn for his own calling.

"But how ridiculous," I exclaimed, with tears of laughter running over my cheeks, "will be the position held by you and your myrmidons, treating all the intellectual giants of your time as if they were babes or im-

beciles! And then to think of the contrast between the writers and those written of!"

"Ha! ha!—but the world wont know which way the contrast points. *That's one grand advantage of the anonymous system!*"

## CHAPTER II.

### A COURSE OF YEARS.

THE *Fire-fly* was started and carried out on the plan proposed, and the result proved the truth of my husband's predictions. 'Tis a wicked world, and the fewer people we praise the better, thought all the writers in its columns, and unquestionably the tone of their articles met with cordial approval from all who held the same opinion.

My husband selected his staff with great judgment. It contained men of intellect and erudition, who had failed, more from moral than mental disqualifications, to win positions of their own in the world, and who were

charmed with a prospect of getting, by their ill-humour, a livelihood which they had failed to earn by their brains. Soured by the neglect, and what they deemed the injustice of the world, these gentlemen displayed a cold-blooded ferocity, in the way in which they set to work to injure the reputations of every writer or politician distinguished by popular favour, that made me at the same time hate and admire them. In the literary department of the paper, it was my husband's rule to pay regard to the particular ambition or disappointment of each writer to whom he gave a book to be reviewed. Thus archæological works were given to some antiquarian writer whose productions had either been condemned as worthless, or had failed to attract any flattering amount of public attention; the best poems were criticised by an unfortunate fellow who, instead of directing his powers to history or political economy, had persisted, with a perversity frequently attendant on intellectual endowments of a high order, in

torturing the world with execrable tragedies; the novels were handed over to an unsuccessful novelist; and our historical critic was a gifted creature who had spent twenty-five years of his life in writing a "History of the Universe, in seventy-four volumes," which he was still in hopes—very faint ones though—of inducing an enterprising firm to publish. In like manner the conduct of our statesmen was examined by sagacious gentlemen who, in addition to a sense of public duty, *which compelled them to speak*, were animated to great exertions by certain private considerations which, of course, they were not so impertinent as to trouble the world with. Charles always maintained that the Duke of Ballyraggan was pitched over by his colleagues, solely because he refused a foreign consulship to a disinterested admirer who, on a nearer examination of his Grace's career, after this little rebuff, very naturally modified his political creed, and conceived himself bound, in mere honesty,

to communicate his latest opinions to his country. But in addition to these old stagers, the *Fire-fly* had amongst its contributors a youthful and vivacious element, consisting of half-a-dozen Irish law-students of the Temple —cheery lads, with a pleasant nationality of brogue and high spirits, elated with a nascent consciousness of intellect, but not burdened with much learning, though they were fresh from the University of Dooblin. These young gentlemen were encouraged to work up carefully, and bring to the office of the *Fire-fly* their sarcasms, which, partly out of national hatred to Englishmen, and partly out of boyish animosity to big-wigs, they spent their lives in constructing against every man of mark in London. It really grieved me to think what a quantity of work my husband got out of these agreeable boys for such a very—very little money! The prospect of getting two or three guineas, and the privilege of telling their friends separately all round ("in confidence, you know, my dear

fellow, strict confidence; you must not mention it to any one") that they wrote that awful slasher in the *Fire-fly* on Brown, or that stunner against poor Smith, was enough to make them work hard for six weeks in collecting materials, hunting up speeches in files of old journals, and ferreting out facts from whole wildernesses of secret literature. And very often, after all their labour and brain racking, their articles were rejected, and they were sent away to weep over their dishonoured manuscripts. But their dejection was not of long continuance; they soon dried their eyes, and went about again, darkly hinting that they were "regular writers" on the *Fire-fly*, and polishing up satire for the grand final discomfiture of the Prime Minister.

But, perhaps, the most amusing feature of the *Fire-fly* was the tone its regular writers adopted with regard to their own profession. It was my husband's wish—and the wish accorded well with the dispositions of his subordinates—that the *Fire-fly* should never

allude to journalists, or authors of any kind, save in terms of unmitigated contempt, and should on all possible occasions impress on the minds of its readers that the vocation of a writer both was, and ought to be, utterly despicable in the eyes of all sensible men. To write at all was a pitiable deflexion from the path of honour; but to get one's living by it was a crime that ought to secure for its perpetrator expulsion from all decent society. To me this was great fun. To me it was ludicrous beyond any farce I had ever witnessed, to see and hear these noisy, angry, disappointed fifth-rate authors, and raw boys ambitious of one day being regularly-employed writers, swagger about, talking of the dignity of privacy, and, at the very moment that they pocketed the pay for their pasquinades and libels, assuming a lofty disdain for those wretched simpletons who subsist by contributing to the organs of periodical literature.

"They are a pretty set of vagabonds," said

my unscrupulous husband, laughing at the figure his puppets made, "they are the sweepings and refuse of all the newspaper offices in London. They number about thirty; and there's scarce one of them with one vestige of reputation, moral or intellectual, that will bear ten seconds' inspection. The best of them are fraudulent bankrupts. My sub-editor has been imprisoned for bigamy. My theological critic, six years since, came to grief for robbing a till in Bermondsey. They are a clique firmly united by isolation, and by being irretrievably cut off from all other sets. In a community of disgrace and disappointment they find good reasons for railing acrimoniously against all who are not marked with their own peculiar brand of ignominy. But they answer my purpose capitally; their loud arrogance imposes on my simple dupes as the voice of authority, and their malevolence diverts attention from their shallow wits."

Truly my husband's purpose was answered. Subscribers poured in from all sides, and our

circulation, in reality a large one, was proclaimed week after week in our columns as double what it was. In quick time the publishers, and other traders, began to advertise in our columns, and we became one of the principal means of puffing bad books, bad coffee, bad boots, bad wine, bad everything, into notoriety. It was true that we did not ruin other newspapers: the *Palladium*, with its strong staff of sound scholars and poignant wits, not only remained the leading journal of criticism, but its circulation even increased slightly under the hostile invectives of the *Fire-fly*; *The Times*, also, remained unshaken, though we prophesied that in six months it would cease to be issued to the public; and, strange to say, the quarterlies and monthlies, which the *Fire-fly* habitually spoke of as the productions of miserable hacks —for the most part ladies the wrong side of sixty—paid their way as well as ever. But still our success was a substantial one, and, at the end of the second year of the *Fire-fly's*

existence, Charles Millicent, Esquire, was able to assure himself that, after paying all its enormous expenses for puffing and canvassing, and after throwing away 1,200*l.* a-year in unnecessary stamps (bought to keep up the reputation of the journal at the publication of the stamp returns) it gave him a clear annual income of 3,400*l.* In these figures there was ample consolation to him for the good taste of educated society being offended by the tone of his paper, and for the opprobrious nick-name which popular sarcasm had affixed to it, by perseveringly calling it the "Gad-fly," instead of the "Fire-fly."

My husband was too shrewd a man to connect himself in his private life with the gang of fellows he had in his pay. The contributors to the *Fire-fly* were very rarely invited to his house, and never when more respectable people were asked; and he had the prudence to keep his connection with the notorious satirical journal in the background and out of sight, though not enveloped in im-

penetrable mystery. He never took up a position on its success, but strove to make its success the means of rising to a higher position. Instead of surrounding himself with a regiment of scribbling toadies, he enlarged in every direction his circle of acquaintance, and took especial pains to cultivate friendly relations with the eminent persons, in politics, literature, and the scientific world, whom his myrmidons were systematically vilifying and attempting to ruin. And Charles Millicent and his wife Miriam, having once made it their ambition to get into Society, were not the people to fail in achieving their desire. *His* intellect, social endowments, and prosperity, and *her* wit and remarkable beauty, were counters that went for something in the game.

I am afraid we were contemptible snobs. We took a good house in a fashionable place between the Park and Audley Street, and, besides a hospitable succession of dinners, I had "at homes" and "receptions" on regular

evenings. I shared an opera-box with Lady Albatross (by-the-bye, she never paid a single guinea of her share), and I had a carriage that was duly displayed, together with its owner, in the Ring, the Gardens, at Chiswick, and the half-dozen other appointed places for an English lady of distinction to be ostentatious in. My husband improved wonderfully in style—of voice, manner, dress. In this last respect he was somewhat affected, and insisted on wearing a particular kind of blue cloth riding-coat with a velvet collar; but this garment, if it was conspicuous, became him, and certainly, as he cantered or ambled his long-tailed blood hack in the Row, there were few men to be seen of a more aristocratic bearing.

"In the name of Adonis," said Count D'Orsay, sitting on his black horse and surveying him through an eye-glass, "if it was not for that sinister expression of countenance, and his abominable red hair, I'd know him."

This speech had not been made many weeks ere my husband and the Count were familiars. In a certain way he became the fashion; and surely he only showed his amiability in conforming himself to the dictates of that society which opened its arms to receive him. He was elected in spite of a few black balls into the Carlton, and became a member of two other smaller, but more exclusive clubs. His name was on the point of being put up at the Athenæum, but for some reason or other it was withdrawn, and he never became a member of that fraternity.

I also became a person of fashion. The parties of Mrs. Grosvenor Millicent (for on emerging from obscurity my husband made that sonorous addition to his name, and was always noticed in the journals as Charles Grosvenor Millicent, Esq.) were sought after. At first I aimed principally at creating an impression by my "dinners," for I knew that many people of importance would con-

descend to enter my house for *a really good* dinner, who would never have been won to visit my drawing-room for music and ices. Moreover, for the first two years of my campaign upon Society, it must be confessed that the ladies on my visiting-list were few, and ladies, though important elements in all very successful entertainments, are not so indispensable at "dinners" as at *soirées*. In this, at the outset, lay the great obstacle in my path; but I triumphed over it by insisting with prayers and even tears on a few selected ones of my masculine admirers, that they should fight my battle for me with my own sex. The Duchess of Balbriggan would never have taken me up, had not the Duke extracted from her a solemn promise to do so, ere he paid off her *écarté* score to General Millington; I should never have got the *entrée* to Hatborough House, if the Earl of Iken had not literally carried me there in his arms. Of course I was not slow to profit by every advantage which my gallant supporters

secured to me, and never failed to exercise all my powers of fascination to convert a mere acquaintance, sullenly conceded, into an enthusiastic friendship. And my efforts were almost invariably successful. I acquired a reputation for extreme amiability; — no wonder! for I dispensed flattery with the same liberality and delicacy as I did my charity, and I would listen for the hour together, with a smile of lively interest, to all the kind reflections a great lady might like to make on her friends. 'Tis a mistake to think that scandal-mongers want the encouragement of verbal response; to have the attention of a pretty face is quite enough for them—and 'tis safer to give them nothing more. My rule was to smile more sweetly than ever when a cruel thought struck me; but I never uttered the cruel speech till I had acquired that position in society where want of feeling passes current for presence of wit. And this forbearance cost me no great effort; for I was of an easy temperament, not burdened

with much constitutional irritability, and too careless of everyone's happiness save my own, to care much about making myself disagreeable; so I practised virtue at a small expense of pain, but with a large return of commendation.

Indeed, I was so amiable a person that I found it in me to forgive Mrs. Aubrey the unkind turn she had done me a few short years before, and to become her most loving friend (in public) and frequent guest in Berkeley Street and Alton Park. She had a world of her own, a sphere of which she was the centre and principal ornament; in some respects her position was better than my own: more secure in wealth, and supported by more powerful people—though less graceful and brilliant; but she was not happy in it. The faint lines of discontent that began day by day to sink deeper and deeper into her cheeks, and a gloomy clouding of her delicate brows, informed me of this, whenever her carriage passed mine in the Park, and, without



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recognising, we stared stonily at each other (each well aware that either knew the other) and exchanged silent menaces, and professions of that scorn which the mute faces of women express to each other with searching strength, and never more forcibly than when to the outer world their countenances are expressionless. There was a whiteness in her countenance, once remarkable for its soft vermeil loveliness, and there was a leaden tint under her large eyes, once so lustrous with merriment, that convinced me I was revenged, that my curse was working, that even at twenty-five years she suffered the wearing agony of a jaded existence. She was wretched; and, though she strove to appear emotionless and impassive under my eye, she winced as if hot irons touched her limbs; and she had the humiliation of knowing I discerned her trouble and defeat.

I had intended leaving her alone—to the enjoyment of the domestic felicity I had secured to her, and to the pleasurable reflec-

tions her conscience supplied her with. I could not in any way accelerate the action of that corroding poison which I had introduced into her life, nor could I add much by personal superintendence to the acuteness of her sufferings; and, as far as the pleasure of witnessing the premature decay of her bloom of beauty and spirits, I had enough of that cheering spectacle in those accidental meetings which the common shiftings of the every-day life of London gave us. To watch her deliberately in her box at the opera, to turn my eyes with agonizing composure upon her in the crush-room, to glance at her as she passed me in her drives, to buy a trinket from the stalls she kept at charity bazaars (she was very charitable) would have afforded me all the pleasures of inspection I required. But she was not content with this comparatively merciful arrangement. If I altered my plans, and, substituting a distant surveillance for a constant espionage, kept her in a bondage more cruelly goading to her pride, and more

destructive of every possibility of self-respect, she compelled me to such conduct. Harshness was forced upon me by her folly.

"My dear," said my husband, "our banker friends wont leave us alone. They'll cause us trouble."

"Indeed," I answered complacently, going on with my matronly duty of pouring out the tea for our breakfast,—"then ere long Stephen Watson will have occasion to say to his wife 'Geraldine, my love, our scribbling friends wont leave us alone.'"

"Quite right, Miriam,—but the war has begun."

"Where was it proclaimed?"

"I can't exactly tell you; but the rumour of the proclamation reached me last night at the Carlton. I was mentioning to Lord Albatross my wish that you should be introduced at St. James's this season, and frankly asked him if he would interest himself to get a sponsor for you in his mother—the Duchess."

"And he was offended? Like a good

husband, he thought you ought to have sued for the protection and influence of Lady Albatross?—By-the-bye, what wretched taste that little woman has in dress!"

"Doubtless he was offended on that ground. But the point of interest is the manner in which the little fool manifested his annoyance. He opened his eyes wider than usual (why he should be so fond of displaying those pink eyes I cannot conceive), hesitated, made a long face, and then,—confound his impudence!—answered, 'Well, really, Millicent, that requires a little consideration. You see, my mother is deuced particular, and all that sort of thing,—and, of course, I can't presume to force her to act against her prejudices. But still, of course, I will see what I can do, and then do my utmost. By-the-bye, old fellow, *what sort of intimacy subsisted at any time between your wife and Mrs. Aubrey?*'"

"How did you reply to his impertinence?"

"Of course I feigned to be unconscious of the offensive part of his question, and answered

in a sufficiently collected manner that 'you and Mrs. Aubrey had known each other years ago—had been (I fancied) together at the same school, but that you knew nothing of each other now.' But I knew his meaning and he mine. We perfectly understood each other; and, when my chance comes, he shall find that I am as good a hand as himself at putting questions. But bless me, Miriam, don't be annoyed about it."

"How can I be otherwise?" I answered, flushing crimson with anger, and wiping away some scalding tears that, in spite of my resolute efforts to retain my composure, started from my eyes.

"Well, well, darling," responded my husband, coolly, not in a heartless, but still in a matter-of-fact and business-like tone, and cracking another egg with his tea-spoon, "I'll allow you have good grounds for vexation; but instead of crying, use your wits in devising the best means to hold your own against that little vixen. How shall it be done? Think of that,

while I think of how I can best instigate my simple-minded clients to laugh at Macaulay's last article in the *Edinburgh*."

My husband occupied the next quarter of an hour in consuming his breakfast and sipping his tea in silence, every now and then ejaculating, "Good, good!—yes, yes!—that'll do," as a fresh point of ridicule presented itself to him, whilst he mentally reviewed the essay on Lord Bacon; and, turning over the unpleasant topic which had just been presented to my mind, I sat in mute gloom, sullenly resolving on schemes of self-defence and revenge.

With a sudden impulse to commit to paper without delay the glowing thoughts that moved hot in his brain, Charles Grosvenor Millicent sprang from his chair, and, having imprinted a hasty kiss of farewell on my forehead, was retreating from the breakfast-room to his study, when I called to him imperiously to stop.

"Well," he answered curtly, "be quick, for I want to be off—to work."

"I have decided on how I must act."

"Indeed! Well there'll be time enough to talk of that to-morrow."

"Perhaps so. But I will not wait an hour till I proceed to action."

"Good! Do what you like. You are clever enough to manage your own affairs."

"I have fixed on the lady who shall present me at the Drawing-room."

"There's nothing like prompt decision, my dear. Who is she?"

"Mrs. Aubrey."

My husband laughed sardonically, but at the same time pleasantly.

"You see, my dear," I explained softly, with a droll intonation, "as we were together at the same school, what is more natural than that I should ask such an old friend to do me that favour, instead of laying myself under an obligation to a great lady like the Duchess of Summerfield or Lady Albatross?"

"But how will you induce her to comply with your wishes?"

"By *ordering* her! You are busy, so I'll manage it all. I shall immediately send a note to Mr. Aubrey, and request him to call on me this morning."

"I would rather you did not."

"And why?" I asked sharply.

"Because I hate the man," responded my husband, with a cloud coming over his countenance, and an expression almost of horror flashing into his unsteady eyes, "and I have a presentiment—that chills me to the very centre of my heart—that that scoundrel will one day be my undoing. And I cannot—I will not—allow you to have any dealings with him."

"Pooh!" I exclaimed, with a short, contemptuous laugh, "are you such a coward that you dread a sharper like that man?"

"I fear no man," Charles Millicent answered, turning white with passion, and hesitating ere he put himself in direct opposition to my stronger will, "but I have a right to limit your acquaintance with Society—and I will."

"Do you *dare* me to disobey you?" I inquired, drawing myself up to my full height, and curling my lip scornfully, and looking him furiously in the face. "Take my advice, Charles Millicent; I am your wife, but if you try to make me your slave, you will miss your end—and convert me into your tyrant."

"Nonsense, nonsense, Miriam," he answered feebly, dropping his eyes before mine, and stammering like a quelled child, "I don't want to contend with you. Do what you like."

The fool! We had been married two years, and had never before had a dispute. This was our first quarrel, and he slunk out of it like a whipt spaniel.

I sent my note to Berkeley Street, begging Mr. Aubrey to do me the honour of paying me a visit without delay. "I should remain at home till I had the pleasure of seeing him." He was a busy man, and had many claims upon his time; in the City he was the acting manager of a joint-stock bank, and an enterprising partner in a discount house, and

at Westminster he was a painstaking Member of Parliament, always present at divisions, and punctual in his attendance on committees. He had the trenchant eloquence almost invariably united to a clear head and strong will, and he could sway a board of directors just as interest dictated; but in the House of Commons he contented himself with sitting silent and watchful, marking how each point of the debate affected the chief party-leaders, and recording his vote at the close, in most cases, with a more distant object in view than the world gave him credit for. He was not a modest man, so as to deem himself not brilliant enough to shine in the first legislative assembly of the world, but fit only to do the plodding work which the more distinguished members disdained; but he was a cunning one, and he saw he should serve his purpose better by a quiet, unpretentious course, than by concentrating on himself, by an exhibition of his finer endowments, the malevolence and sarcastic hatred of half-a-hundred rivals.

But, busy a man as he was, I knew he would find time to obey my summons; and he presented himself before me ere it was noon-time, explaining that he came so early in order that I might not deprive myself of my customary afternoon's drive, by waiting at home for him. He was delighted to see me. He regretted that he had not had the pleasure and the honour of visiting me sooner since my marriage; but he trusted I should permit him to renew his former intimacy with me. My old friend Geraldine would be in raptures at the prospect of renewing her acquaintance with me. He trusted my husband was well, strong, and hearty, and was not so imprudent as to overtax his brain. He had a warm regard for Mr. Millicent; had sympathized in his success, and always read *Fire-fly*— indeed, thought that there was not another journal of criticism worth reading. He was kind enough, also, to add, with a smile of emphatic homage, that he sincerely congratulated me on having won a position in society

which I was so eminently qualified to adorn. And when the man had uttered this last compliment, he seated his well-dressed person on the end of the very sofa I occupied, and, languidly stroking his glossy black beard and moustaches, he waited for my response.

"And now that we have sacrificed enough to politeness," I said, "don't you think we had better proceed to business?"

"Business, Mrs. Millicent? I had hoped I should not have heard that word mentioned here. One is so bored with it in Lombard Street and St. Stephen's. But, since I flattered myself with a hope destined to be disappointed, let me assure you that I am your attentive servant; or rather, to dispose of the painful difficulty, let me say that it shall be my *pleasure* to attend to your *business*."

"Upon my word, you have made progress in your education. What polished trifling! What a flow of compliments! Surely you were born of an ancient lineage, and, when you wore a napkin pinned before you in a

butler's pantry, were a prince in disguise!"

"Spare me, Mrs. Millicent!'

"Have you spared me?"

"On my honour, I have never wittingly wronged you."

"'Tis well you mentioned the word. There should always be honour among thieves."

"Thieves?—where is the thief?"

"Why surely, Mr. Aubrey, you don't forget that I am one! 'Tis but a few short years since I was found guilty by my own countrymen in an open court of theft, and you heard me proclaimed a thief. How, then, can I, in your presence, feign ignorance of my proper designation?"

"My dear Mrs. Millicent, I am sorry to hear you speak in this tone. Why harp on these bitter and embittering recollections? As far as you are concerned, I have forgotten the past, and live only in the present."

"How noble of you! But I am a per-

verse woman, and don't care to profit by your generosity. In short, I reject it. I prefer that you should continue to think of me as Miriam Copley, the thief! The title tickles the ears of Mrs. Grosvenor Millicent, is pleasant to her self-love, and reminds her how grateful she ought to be for the exaltation of lot she now experiences. Moreover, she has companions in ignominy—you and Geraldine."

"Indeed!" he simpered, moving uneasily under my glance, as my satire became more personal,—"indeed?"

"Ay! Come, tell me honestly what you think of the matter. To steal, is to take away another's property without a right to do so; and it does not signify, as far as the morality of theft goes, what the property stolen is. You remember the old rhyme of your nursery days, 'It is a sin to steal a pin.' Well, my best property was my fair name; and Geraldine filched it from me. Say, then, is she not a thief? And you! What are

you? Pah! you lying broker, you may well turn pale, for you know not how many of your forged acceptances I have seen. Say, then, are not you too a thief? Oh! if all the good people of our acquaintance had the courage to proclaim boldly what they are, how many surprised faces we should see at church next Sunday!"

"Well, well!"

"No, no,—it's very ill. But let that pass. Do you plead guilty for self and wife?"

"Guilty, beautiful challenger!" he answered with a forced smile. "But, then, we have as yet escaped conviction. For, after all, discovery's the sin."

"And therein is the blackness of your perfidy. You have abjured the honour that ought to dwell amongst thieves, and have whispered slanders about me, as though your own reputation were a rock of granite."

"I swear you wrong me," he cried vehemently. "You wont believe my honour, so I wont rant about it; but, in the name of everything solemn, I assure you that you are mis-

taken. I have not taken a step or breathed a word to injure you ; but, on the contrary, I have often risked much to help you; and, if any power could win me to desert my devotion to the interest of my immediate self, it would be the hope of winning your favour."

There was such fervour in his voice and manner that I was compelled to believe him ; and any lingering doubts I had that he was simulating emotion in order to make me his dupe, vanished when he stamped his foot vehemently on the ground, and added with a stronger oath than the walls of my drawing-room were in the custom of hearing,—

"Ah, I see how it is, and who has been playing us this infernal trick. 'Tis that sulky child, the milk-and-water wife of mine, that doll who, slight as she is, wont be entirely crushed. Why was I fool enough to marry her? Why did you let me? But rest easy, Miriam. She shall repent her rashness in daring to renew the war with you."

He clenched his fist threateningly, as he

said this, as if he would have relished striking to the earth the object of his anger.

"There, there!" I broke in, with a laugh. "Let us have no more of these heroics. There's no need of them. I believe you fully. But your babe has been prattling about me, and she must not only be silenced for the future, but I must take steps to prevent ill consequences from the indiscretion of which she has already been guilty."

"Quite right! Whatever you order me, I'll do to my utmost. You have a right to command me."

"I should have preferred not coming in personal contact with your wife. I should rather have left her to her life of consuming regret and discontent, and satisfied myself with watching from a distant station the lines of sorrow deepening in her face. This course would have been more merciful, in better taste, less likely than any other to become an element of remorse to me, when loss of beauty and spirits shall prevent my being admired, or

amused, by others. But another line of action is necessary. Her heart not only must be broken, but I must help to break it."

"You?"

"Yes. She and all her family must be my frequent guests, and the world must be taught to regard me as her intimate friend, and so disabuse themselves of the notion they are busily forming, that a mystery exists between us, the revelation of which would affect my shame—and that only."

The fellow smiled with insolent satisfaction, as I opened my plan to him. "He congratulated me," he said, "on the excellence of my plan;" and he congratulated himself also, for if I became Mrs. Aubrey's familiar associate, I must become his intimate friend also!

"Shall we find much difficulty in dealing with her?"

"Possibly."

"She had a will of her own, when I was her servant."

"I have done my best to break it!" responded my companion, with a significant smile,—a surpassingly cruel smile.

"Does she know of your origin, our former histories, and the perfect acquaintance you have with the part she played in my Old Bailey episode?"

"I taunt her with them continually,—that is to say, when she is rebellious."

"Have you been equally communicative to her family? Surely you have not admitted the Reverend Archer Plumetop into your confidence?"

"No, I have not; nor do I wish to do so; for in holding over Geraldine the threat of informing her family on these particulars lies my chief influence with her. She would wince under the ridicule which such an exposure would draw upon her from the world; but she would feel far more acutely the humiliation of such a confession in her own domestic circle. There never was any love lost between her and her sister; but now Geraldine hates her most

cordially. Miss Plumetop, after all, is not going to be an old maid, but is engaged to be married to a baronet of good character, wealth, and county influence. 'Tis an excellent match for her; and Geraldine, contrasting her sister's good fortune with her own miserable blunder, is consumed with shame and malice. You know her amiable nature better than I can tell you."

"That's good! Then she'll submit easy enough?"

"No fear of that;—after a squall or two, perhaps."

"Send her to call on me."

"When? At what hour?"

"This afternoon: — no — to-morrow, at three."

Mr. Aubrey took my hand in his and kissed it, and then left the room, on my signifying to him that I wished our interview should come to an end.

Punctual to the hour I had appointed, Geraldine Aubrey made her appearance. Her

careful toilet could not conceal from me the inroads that ever-present tribulation had made on her health. Her cheeks were paler than the white lace veil which she had drawn in folds round the border of her cockle-shell bonnet of pink satin. She made, however, a courageous attempt to control her agitation, and to some extent succeeded.

"Sit down, Mrs. Aubrey. I am delighted to see you."

"Thank you, I will stand. I have only come for a few moments—for business—not for pleasure."

"I see your husband has communicated to you what passed between us yesterday."

"He has."

"Last time we had a private interview, you treated me somewhat cruelly, Geraldine. You had prostrated me, and, with your foot on my neck, you poured sarcasm and scorn down upon me. The tables are turned now. You are at my feet now but if you are submis-

sive, and obey me meekly, I'll not rain down ridicule and reproaches upon you."

She bit her little lips together for a few seconds, and then, with a curl of the upper one, she replied in a tone as soft and silvery as my own :—

"You were always a good imitator; and, now that you suppose our relations are reversed, you think you cannot do better than follow the example I set you in time past, and fashion your gibes after mine. But perhaps you are mistaken in thinking the power all on your side, and none of it on mine. I am not yet lying crushed at your feet."

"What!" I asked, with an air of scornful amusement, "are you so mad as to think of resisting me?"

"I will not oppose you," she answered, in the bold attempt to make terms instead of receiving them, "if you demand anything in reason. I will bind myself solemnly never to whisper one word to your disadvantage, and to give an unqualified contradiction to any

injurious report that I may hear concerning our former acquaintance with each other. I will also engage to speak of you whenever you are discussed in my presence with hearty praise, and I am ready in public—when the eyes of the world are on us—to accept and respond to your greetings with cordiality. This much I am ready to do, to buy your silence, and to save me from the vexation of a *fracas* in Portland Place. Will this satisfy you? Is it enough?"

"No—it is not enough," I answered. "You have dared to caluminate me, and now you must undo your work by presenting me at the next Drawing-room, and never giving an entertainment, either at Berkeley Street or at Alton Park, without sending me a card of invitation, so that I may be present amongst your guests; and, lastly, you must insist on your family paying me the same excess of homage which they would offer to a lady of high rank. This is my demand, and I will 'bate nothing of it."

"Then, Miriam," she answered quickly, but with more pride of manner, and with flashing eyes, "do your worst. Go to Portland Place and tell my foolish old father and mother that their daughter has married a servant. I can endure their storm of consternation and anger, and I shall even be able to support life under the exultation of my sister. It will be to their interest to keep the secret; and if you go to the world with your intelligence, you'll only be proclaiming what you are so anxious should remain unknown—that you are my discharged servant, and that you have suffered imprisonment for theft."

She evidently expected this speech to vanquish me. As yet she saw only one of the whips that I held over her; and, in a brief illusive belief that the victory in the contest was hers, she repeated her taunt, "Go—do your worst."

"I will obey you if you like," I answered with a smile,—"but first hear what my *worst* is. You are ignorant of it at present."

"Ah?"

"Geraldine Watson," I said, with venomous deliberation—"listen to me. It rests with me to overwhelm you with confusion, or not, as I like. Whenever I care to do so, I can put you in a felon's dock, and bring you to a felon's punishment. I know the locksmith who made you the false keys with which you opened my desk and boxes, and put in them the property you afterwards swore I had stolen from you. I have the man's evidence in writing, duly witnessed; and he is yet alive to repeat his testimony. And now, Geraldine Watson, I will—do—my —*worst!*"

"You cannot—you could not!" she exclaimed, sinking down on the sofa on which she had a few minutes before proudly refused to sit—"you cannot—oh, spare me!"

"Do you consent, then, to my terms?" I asked, still smiling—"do you consent?"

"I consent to—to—any—thing," her lips faintly articulated, as a look of horror came

over her face, and she fell back on the lounge —senseless.

I had no more trouble with Mrs. Aubrey. She was my obedient slave in all things. She introduced me to all her intimate friends as one to whom she was passionately devoted, and she never received visitors in her house without entreating me to join them. Nor were her papa and mamma less affectionate in their demeanour to me, for they loaded me with attentions and courted me as prudence bade them court the woman who held in her hands —to retain it unimpaired or to destroy it— the possession which, beyond all others, they most valued,—their social respectability. As for the use which I made of my power, I can honestly aver that my strength was never exercised for any other end save that of self-preservation, and that I was never betrayed into insolence or needless cruelty to the foolish people over whom I held suspended a drawn sword. In private I behaved with politeness and kindness to Geraldine, as if she had really

been—what I pretended she was—my very good friend. I never, by word or glance, by the bitterness of the tongue, or the scorn of a curling lip, reminded her of my contempt for her; I never taunted her with her treachery to me, and her base perjury. But it was quite as much out of tenderness to myself as pity to her that I abstained from uncharitable reflections. It was pain enough to me to see the terrible inroads of premature decay busily working upon her mind and body, to mark her delicate roundness of feature disappear, and the pink bloom of her complexion give way to a bloodless pallor, to notice the black cloud over her brows daily becoming more and more deep, and to start at the demonstrations of her ghastly factitious mirth, with the remembrance of how merrily she laughed and chattered when I first knew her—a doll child. I was sated—disgusted with vengeance. I would gladly have spoken comfort to her, but she would never have construed such expressions of sympathy as being others than polished and subtly

devised sarcasms. I would have lessened the anguish of her existence by relieving her of the torture of my companionship, but I was afraid to do so; I dreaded that if I withdrew my personal influence from her she would resume her old position of active hostility towards me.

Poor little thing! What a wretched fate was hers! It was true that she was false and bad, and merited a stern lot. But who was I that I should judge her? Was not I false and bad also? Moreover, the retribution that was gradually killing her was of my construction, apart from the indignity and self-abasement she experienced in my presence; for had it not been for my reticence she would never have linked herself to the cold-blooded tyrant who missed no opportunity of probing the wounds of her suffering heart. The man absolutely relished the changed position of his domestic affairs, and enjoyed having me in his house silently bearing testimony to Geraldine of her abject humiliation. I advised him to live more

in the country, to see less company, and to make arrangements adapted to the delicate state of her health; I told him that if he would lead a more retired life, and remove his wife from London society, I would be easy with her promise never again to cause me annoyance, and would undertake no longer to burden her with my personal espionage. But he only smiled, and said, that amongst the many reasons he had for very much liking my present course of procedure, the chief one was the frequent opportunities it gave him of seeing me; and he implored me, by whatever value I put on his happiness, or my own interests, not to diminish the vigilance of my surveillance over Geraldine.

At first my husband avoided Stephen Watson; but, after a time his exclamations of dislike to him became less frequent, and a considerable intimacy sprung up between them. They had pecuniary transactions which, at the time, Charles thought advantageous to himself and in every way

honourable. He was often in want of money, for, successful as the *Fire-fly* had proved, he was expensive in his habits, as I was in mine,—and our income was always anticipated. It was therefore very convenient to have a friend in the monetary world, who, without making the slightest noise about the matter, could procure him supplies of cash. Moreover, Charles Grosvenor Millicent began to look on John Aubrey as a useful and creditable friend in other respects. John Aubrey stood well in the House, and better in the City; he belonged to a good set of clubs, and knew intimately the leading men of those aristocratic coteries in which gambling with public securities, the turf, and field-sports form the chief pursuits of life; John Aubrey had also a small but choice stud at Alton Park for the delectation of himself and friends.

Mr. Aubrey therefore became as intimate and sincere a friend of my husband as I was of his wife. He was a constant visitor at our

house, and exerted himself in every way to render himself agreeable to me. His manner was always deferential and considerate; he found that his flattery was displeasing to me, and he forthwith ceased annoying me with it; he discovered that any repetition of the old homage of the Portland Place garden would have offended my pride, and he was in consequence careful not to renew it or remind me of it.

He discovered, however, that I still retained my old liking for hearing chit-chat about Rawleigh Ufford, and he gratified my humour—only cautiously, and at intervals. He approached this subject with restraint—either genuine and arising from a consciousness of the extreme delicacy of the ground, or assumed for the purpose of tickling my curiosity and making me long to hear more.

If at this period he had conceived the design of winning the terrible position over me which he eventually gained, he was a profounder, more far-seeing, and more calcu-

lating knave than even I give him the credit for having been. But it is possible that I judge him too charitably. This, however, I do know;—the man watched me keenly, and almost as unceasingly as I watched Geraldine. Especially did he scrutinize me when either I looked at my husband or my husband glanced at me. It was not long ere I detected that he was bent on discovering whatever secrets the external propriety of our married life might hide, and that he was already confident that Charles and Miriam Millicent loved each other less than they hoped to do before their marriage. What brought him to this conclusion I cannot say. Possibly his intimate acquaintance with my husband's fickle and impetuous nature and habitual deflections from morality guided him in the formation of his judgment. Anyhow, he had discerned the truth, and I knew he had discerned it—months ere he permitted himself to speak of, or even hint, his suspicions to me.

"Why did you never tell me that you saw

Mr. Ufford in Paris?" he asked of me suddenly one day.

"I thought I had done so," I answered, colouring.

"Indeed you never did. Had you mentioned the subject to me, I should certainly have remembered it."

"How came you to hear of the circumstance then?—from Charles?"

"No. Mr. Ufford was mentioning it to me only last night."

"Last night!—Mr. Ufford!—then he is in England?"

"Yes, and I had the honour of dining with my old master yesterday. We talked a great deal about you. He was anxious to hear if you were happy in your married life—and said, with a laugh, he trusted your life was not '*married without the i.*' Of course my answer was—was—"

"What?"

"Oh, I became a poet, and painted the picture with roseate hues."

"Has particular business brought him to England?" I inquired, biting my lip.

"The Earl of Linton-Stetchworth is ill—very ill—cannot live many days, or even hours, and has sent for him. But don't mention this to anyone. You'll hear more from me in a short time."

These sentences were exchanged in the presence of several persons who were calling upon me, and as soon as they were uttered, hastily and in an under tone, John Aubrey left me. I did not see him again till six days had elapsed, and then the occasion of our meeting was in my own house during the height of a crowded evening party, composed of the very best of my husband's professional friends, a few learned professors from Oxford and Cambridge, a bishop or two, and a crush of those fashionable people, of whom I had by that time a large number on my visiting list, and who were good enough to like Mrs. Grosvenor Millicent's entertainments, "because one was sure to meet such queer

people at them—people one never met anywhere else!"

John Aubrey had not been specially invited to make his appearance, but such a degree of easy familiarity had sprung up between him and myself and my husband, that he was sure of a welcome (as far as words went), whenever he entered our house. On this occasion he had not come without an object. Watching for a good opportunity of saying a few words to me privately, he stood patiently in a crowded corner of one of my drawing-rooms, and when he saw me relieved for a few seconds from the press of people, to each of whom, as a hostess ambitious of winning the applause of all men, I contrived to make a pleasant speech, he glided up to me, and commended himself to my especial notice.

"You have news—what is it?" I said, curtly.

"Great news! The Earl of Linton-Stetchworth is dead, and my old master is Lord Ufford. From my heart I say, 'May he

live long and happily!' I am a scoundrel in some things, Mrs. Millicent,—you know I am,—but I am sincere and earnest in my devotion to Lord Ufford, and proud still to be his humble servant."

"I believe you," I answered, pleased with the man's earnestness, "I know you are strongly attached to him, and that's the only good thing I do know of you. But honour without wealth is a curse."

"Yes—almost as bad a one as wealth without honour. But Lord Ufford has both. The Earl has provided handsomely, indeed lavishly, for several of his creatures, but has left the bulk of his fortune to his nephew. Lord Ufford has a revenue which amounts at the lowest estimate to twenty thousand a-year.

"This is indeed good news!" I answered, my eyes flashing with animation, and my heart beating excitedly.

"Ay, it is!" he replied, slowly, and after looking fixedly and with searching scrutiny into my face for a score seconds, he added in

accents clear and distinct to me, though no one listening by my side could have heard them, "and you would have had more reason to call it good news if what has been hadn't been—if what is were not."

"Eh?—what mean you?"

"I'm only thinking of what *might* have been."

"A subject fruitful of tears to all of us!"

"You have been married little more than four years to my friend Charles Millicent. Four years and a-half since, that is less than five years ago, I spent time, and labour, and money in searching for you. I put such advertisements in the papers, that if you had read them, you would have done your best to come to me; I had the keenest agents of the police in my pay, trying to discover your place of concealment; but we failed.—Here, step two steps this way, and so give that dangling guardsman to understand that you had rather not be interrupted just now, and that you wish our *tête-à-tête* to be continued."

I did as I was bid. I looked the young officer straight in the face without recognising him, and then receded a few paces with John Aubrey. A fear flashed across me, that I might make myself conspicuous by paying such marked attention to him; but I was reassured by seeing myself in a mirror, looking undisturbed, with my radiant complexion of its usual brightness, and in every respect like my ordinary self, except that I was perhaps more than commonly beautiful.

"Make haste," I observed, trying to assume a carelessness I did not feel; "we may not be remarked upon."

"Lord Ufford had ordered me to hunt for you, and bring you to him."

"I know that. He himself told me so."

"I called on Charles Millicent and asked him, as an old friend of Lord Ufford's, to assist me in my search; for as I knew he had seen you, and knew my master's old friends and connections better even than I do, I thought he might be of use to me. And he responded

heartily to my application; he took journeys to distant parts of England to enquire after you; he organized a new system of secret search after you."

"*He!—he* did all this?"

"Ay, and all the time he had you snugly cooped up under another name, in the village where he married you."

"What motive had he for such hypocrisy?"

"Ask him—*the cheat!* Mrs. Millicent, he fairly outwitted me! But possibly I may one day be even with him! And as for you—if you asked him for an explanation, I doubt not, he would reply—'All's fair in Love!'"

"Love?"

"Yes. Lord Ufford wanted to marry you; and I, without due consideration, told Millicent that such was the case, and he, feeling that such an arrangement would be little in accordance with the gratification of his own whims, took good care that you should never be Rawleigh Ufford's wife—at least, not till you had first been his."

"Does Lord Ufford know of Mr. Millicent's dissimulation?"

"No—no. I never told him anything about his old friend's behaviour." He answered drily. "A poor man must have his secrets. And it is not my custom to pluck my pears till they are ripe."

With these words he left me, and soon afterwards disappeared from my drawing-rooms. But he had not parted from me ten seconds, ere my husband came close up to me, and in the sullen murmur with which well-bred men sometimes vent their irritation on their wives in society, said:—

"What has that valet been talking to you about?"

"His old master, dear Charles," I answered, "and his—"

"His what?"

"Oh—nothing—only his devotion to him."

"Indeed!" answered my husband with a sneer, and with his voice raised to a pitch, so that all near us could hear his words, "surely

Rawleigh is to be congratulated! has he come in for fortune?"

"Yes," I replied in an equally audible tone, "the Earl of Linton-Stetchworth is dead, and he is now Lord Ufford, with 20,000*l.* a-year."

The intelligence flew like lightning through the company, and I was inundated with requests for further particulars? What! The Earl of Linton-Stetchworth was dead at last? Had he repented on his death-bed? Was it true that the Bishop of London had been summoned to administer the Sacrament to him? Had he provided for those abominable creatures? Who was his heir? Mr. Rawleigh Ufford? Indeed? Bless me, it was only yesterday that he left England broken-hearted because that charming girl, Augusta Wingfield, gave her hand to Lord Cheveley! Dear me, how times had changed! The Earl dead, the title extinct, Lord Cheveley dead, too, Lady Cheveley a widow, Rawleigh Ufford a peer of the realm! What a mistake *she* had made!

"'Tis a mistake a good many people make, Lady Cawley," I observed drily, and with bitterness, to the good dame who made the above comment on Augusta Wingfield's choice.

"What's the mistake? what's the mistake?" asked a fussy old physician, who was not remarkable for his powers of discernment.

"The mistake, Dr. Limpet, of marrying the wrong person."

## CHAPTER III.

### LOVE AND LITERATURE.

"WHAT is Friendship?" I asked of my husband one day.

"A compact," he answered, "entered into by two or more men to puff each other's writings."

"And how long does it last?"

"With sensible people," replied my husband, "like the treaties of States, so long as it answers the purposes of the contracting parties—but no longer."

He was a variable man, and in all matters of opinion and sentiment veered like the

wind; but if he had a permanent view of any kind with regard to human affairs, it was embodied in the above conversation. He was an intensely selfish person, but his easy manner of talking and the cordiality of his address gained him the credit of being "one of the best-hearted fellows alive." 'Tis to be remarked on what a meagre stock of real goodness the reputation of "being one of the best fellows alive" usually rests. Charles Grosvenor Millicent never swerved an inch out of the path which interest, or irritability, or some selfish humour of the moment dictated; he would never have accorded his protection to poor starving Miriam Copley if it had not been by chance his whim just then to be merciful; he never forbore from any gratification on which he set his mind; a sense of duty never caused him to falter in a course of injustice, or to stop in a plan of misguided benevolence; and yet he had more praise for his amiability and tenderness than usually falls to the lot of those conscientious mortals the

good of whose lives fails to attract observation because it has no companion evil.

Men liked him, and gathered round him. They forgave him all his offences, the malevolence of his journal, and the fierce animosity he displayed to old supporters and new rivals, and were content to find in his abilities, in his early trials, possibly also in his success, excuses for his bad qualities, whilst they extolled with enthusiasm his good ones. And, I must own that, highly favoured as he was with the friendship of celebrated and agreeable persons, I found none so truly to my taste as those writers with whom he was intimate in his private life, which, as I have already said, he had the wit to keep altogether distinct from the proceedings of the unscrupulous *Fire-fly*.

It was a strange world, that author-world in which I for many years moved, alternating between it and the more decorous one of fashion, as idle young men dance at a Casino to-night, and to-morrow at a great ball in Belgravia. It was better fed and better

clothed than Smollett's, but it was quite as grotesque. As a rule its members were all persons of no ordinary power, but the cases in which the power was rightly applied were exceptional. By some fatality nine-tenths of them had their ambitions set in direct opposition to their endowments, and (more amusing still) were working away heart and soul on subjects which any observer, regarding their ordinary habits of life, would have supposed the last things they would have cared about. The comic writer was as often as not a dismal imitation of a wet curate; and the brilliant rogue who rattled out laughter, and song, and *bon mot* over creaming champagne would, on inquiry, be found to be directing the best energies of his mind to the defence of the Spanish Inquisition, and never to be thoroughly at peace with himself and all mankind, save when present at a funeral or an execution. Roaring Tom Plunkett, who never by any chance left a supper-table without having first crawled out from under it,

earned his whisky and devilled kidneys by writing simple stories for children. Clarion Cockchafer, the fervid poet who was everlastingly proclaiming the universal brotherhood of man and the speedy downfall of tyrants, in songs much admired by the penny theatres, was known amongst his friends by the *sobriquet* of "Coat-Armour," and in a memorable speech made at a Mansion-House dinner, had asserted that no man was a gentleman who could not trace his ancestry up to Edward I. Tutburgh, the best writer in his day of Bacchanalian songs, never filled high the flowing bowl with any stronger beverage than milk; and Chumley, who wrote the famous war-leaders in *The Dauntless Avenger*, and never wearied of taunting Europe with surrendering her glorious traditions for the enervating pleasures of repose, was a mild little fellow, enfeebled by years, and found his chief enjoyments in playing bowls and breeding lop-eared rabbits at his cottage in Brompton. Nor were the ladies less remarkable; but I must

pause,—for we women never speak slightingly of, or ridicule our own sex!

But these droll personages gave no just idea of the fraternity; they were the eccentricities of the order, and were as singular for their want of similitude to the best of their brethren as for any other reason. I had the honour of knowing intimately men and women, to converse with whom was a liberal compensation for all the disappointments of life,—calm, philosophic historians; enthusiastic explorers of those remote eras to which a bed of clay or a coal-field are the student's most intelligent guides; simple-hearted, fervid poets; profound and highly-finished scholars, famous for their rare endowments and attainments, but careless, indeed to all appearance unconscious of their celebrity, and anxious only for the welfare of those pursuits of which their distinction had been only a trifling accident;—those choicest minds who, of "their own fame forgetful," "share in nature's immortality."

I found the popular judgments on the followers of authorcraft to be one-sided, illiberal, unjust, and in many cases utterly untrue. It is the favourite opinion of the world that writers are,—beyond all other sets of men,—vain, irritable, arrogant, jealous, and continually occupied with the petty contentions, and bickerings, and paltry dissensions of their companions. But I do not hesitate to say that such a charge is a vile slander. Possibly their quarrels occupy more general attention than the feuds of any other class; this, however, may not be attributed to a vulgar anxiety on their part to obtrude their private affairs on public observation, but to the fact that the public will be curious and gossip about such matters. Much against his will, a writer is not permitted to enjoy that privacy which every gentleman would like to maintain; for every idle person who borrows his books from a circulating library conceives he has a right to clack about the poor man's private affairs,—whether he is a good father, or takes

too much wine after dinner, or goes regularly to church. If a fashionable poet is laid up with lumbago in St. James's Street, half the gentility of the West End call on him; if a celebrated writer quarrels with his wife, or (which is the same thing) she quarrels with him, the mob of people who have read his works form themselves into two factions,—the one sympathizing with "the unfortunate genius," and the other leaving their cards on his "patient victim;" and the farce concludes when both sides, weary of their game of make-believe morality, join hands and call the unfortunate genius an absurd coxcomb for thinking that the world wants to be bored with hearing the narration of his domestic woes.—Again, writers are an especially irritable race! Well they may, some of them, be not the most amiable people alive; but how about their censors? Is there only one bishop on the Bench too prone to call his subordinate clergy ugly names, and, taunting them with the birch-rods of boyhood, hold over them, *in*

*terrorem*, the punishment of the next world? And as to their arrogance and jealousy, before any one gravely prefers these charges against a class whose misfortune it is to be conspicuous, let him take the trouble to examine the moral condition of other sets of men. Are there no "first-rate haters" at the bar? Is there no insolence in the pulpit? Hear physicians of the rival schools of Homœopathy and Allopathy talk of each other, and then appreciate the Christian humility of tone displayed by doctors when they disagree. 'Tisn't long since a distinguished barrister was knocked clean down, bodily, not intellectually, by the stout fist and stalwart arm of a forensic opponent; but who would dream of hinting, with the memory of Lord Brougham fresh amongst us, that gentlemen of the long robe have not the sweetest of tempers? What would Mrs. Grundy say if, on getting out of her omnibus in the City on dividend day, she saw the Editor of the *Times* and the Editor of the *Examiner*

having a round, out of the noble art of self-defence, on the pavement? Why, the respectable lady would only gather up her skirts, and say, "Ah! I thought so—as usual—it's them authors at it again." Bless me, to hear people talk, with Disraeli's "Curiosities of Literature" supplying them with their text, of authors as being emphatically the *irritabile genus*, one would imagine that all other callings were void of internal discord; and yet in every country district throughout the land the clergy hold internecine warfare, the soldiers of the contending armies disdaining to eat bread and salt in each other's tents, and mutually designating each other as "dark" and "unsound." And the same game I have been told goes on at Exeter and St. James's Halls. But then it is only fair to say that these spiritual wranglers have the grace to call their factions "parties," and their ill-humour "principle."

Away with the foolish calumny! Consider the trials an author has to bear, which other

professional men are comparatively, if not altogether, ignorant of. He cannot exercise his calling without having his moral and mental constitution, his aims and his artistic capabilities, his honesty and his learning, subjected to a *public* examination by critics who, from circumstances quite distinct from intellectual competence,—from the bias of early education, indolence, ill-health, or habitual frivolity,—are disqualified to do him justice. He must hear with patience sweeping condemnations of his labours, although the very language in which the judgment is conveyed shows that the censor has the most meagre and inadequate acquaintance with the subject on which he speaks. Not only must he submit without complaining to have his opinions misunderstood and misrepresented, and his attainments and views of life ridiculed, but ever and again, not once, but repeatedly, he will, through the malice, or more frequently the carelessness, of critics, have sentiments attributed to him which he not only has never countenanced by word,

or hint, or inference, but which he holds in the hottest detestation. A flood of hostile criticism may pour upon him at that critical point when, having toiled long in the background, he was rapidly advancing to honour in the van, and he may in consequence be cut off for years from the honour and fame which he deserves, and, to descend to meaner considerations,—but still considerations which, mean as they are, it is thought eminently praiseworthy for all other men to give heed to!—he may consequently be prevented from rearing his children, and supporting those who depend upon him, in the comfort and dignity he would like to surround them with, and may have for years to bear with the privations of poverty, which cruelly afflict a good man by striking not at the love which he bears to himself, but the love which he cherishes for others. How would bishops like to have their charges, popular preachers their sermons, my lords of the ermine their judgments, physicians their prescriptions, City-men their joint-stock com-

panies, soap-boilers their soap, treated in the same unceremonious manner as is the book of every author,—scholar or scribbler? I am inclined to think those right reverend and very complacent gentlemen would be thrown into a portentous commotion, and would cry out for protection to the laws relating to libel. From some corner it may be suggested to me, with a touch of scorn, that in saying this I only show *the cause* of the irritability of authors, and that showing *why a thing is* is a very different thing from proving *it isn't*. And this taunt would be justifiable if I paused here; but I maintain that this fiery persecution, which at first so grievously agitates the feelings of its victims, from being long and regularly continued, has the result, in the great majority of cases, of making those against whom it is especially directed sublimely indifferent to its provocations, or, at least, callous, and consequently insensible, to its stings. I believe that when I took an active part in the world of authors, there was more generosity of senti-

ment and action amongst them than was to be found amongst any other workers in London. I had the good fortune to know other and nobler specimens of the order than the virulent, venomous, unhappy fellows who formed the chief portion of the staff of the *Fire-fly*.

Noble-hearted men and women—scholars, writers, wits, poets—to you, who endowed me with a large share of the happiness I have had in this world, I make this acknowledgment of my affection and admiration for you. For you only it is intended,—not for him who would be humorous and write epigrams upon the lid of his mother's coffin.

Encouraged by the society into which I had fallen, I fell to writing, and published my first novels, my poems, and numerous love-songs set to music. Success,—that is to say, money and the tinsel splendour of London notoriety,—followed upon my efforts. I wrote vivaciously, as my blood ran; capriciously, as my humour dictated; bitterly, as I felt at heart; and I hit the taste and the sub-earnestness of those I

addressed. I wrung as much as a thousand pounds from a fashionable publisher for the best of my novels, and I sold those silly namby-pamby verses beginning, "Why laugh when weeping pains us less?" for 20*l.* a-line. What a deal of harm they have done to sentimental young ladies, thumping away the accompaniment out of time on Broadwood's and Erard's keys! But I question whether the prophetess whose name I bear, with all her long lease of posthumous renown, got so much for her songs. I became the rage as an inspired, as well as a beautiful, woman. A memoir of me, all wrong, of course, appeared in "The Dictionary of Celebrities," and I was inundated with letters of enthusiastic praise and adoration from correspondents, known and unknown, anonymous or rejoicing in most outlandish and queer names, some of whom, I am sorry to say, whatever else they had learnt in my books, had not acquired from them the art of spelling correctly. Portraits of Miriam Grosvenor Millicent (proofs, 2*l.* 2*s.*) appeared in the windows

of the best print-shops in London, and found many buyers who, if they had too much good sense to care *for the poetess*, had too much good taste not to be charmed *with the woman*. And I was praised in the journals. Oh, how I was praised! Faugh! What columns of awkward adulation, with the lightness of my cook's soufflets, but not the flavour of my husband's wine, in every sentence!

But there were indeed some and numerous exceptions to the general worthlessness of the criticism with which I was deluged. One reviewer especially, who, in addition to the will, had *the power—of mind and time*—to pay proper attention to me, was in the habit of giving a careful analysis of my compositions, and passing judgment, justly but severely, on their merits. He never spared me—at least, I think not, for I often winced under his tersely-worded sentences of reproof; but with an equal hand he also measured out to me guidance and encouragement. He was one of those conscientious students who do vast,

and too frequently unacknowledged, services to literature; and, years subsequent to his first castigation of me, I had the satisfaction of showing him all his criticisms, stored up in my commonplace book, and of assuring him that, if he had not made me a better writer, he had made me a better woman.

But, in spite of my literary success, I was not happy. Possibly better women would have been spoilt by the incessant flattery and petting that I underwent, and the continual incentives to ambition and discontent which I experienced. By turns I was allured and goaded into badness. Naturally very vain, I could not rest without adulation, although the clumsy fulsomeness of most of that which was heaped upon me offended my good taste, and cut my self-respect to the quick. The miserable ambition to mount higher in the world of fashion, to improve my set, to be the leader of a coterie which should be spoken of with approval, induced me to do meannesses which I blush to reflect upon,

and blushed at the time to perpetrate. To gain a grand acquaintance, I more than once turned the cold shoulder on an old friend. I adopted the current affectation of speaking slightingly of the middle classes. I caused the arms of the ancient and distinguished family of Copley to appear impaled with those of Millicent on the panels of my carriage; and the thousand ridiculous artifices I used to attract the notice of my superiors would have done credit, or discredit, to my intimate friends, the Plumetops. In dress and every particular of personal expenditure, I was as extravagant as if my husband had been a man of large landed estate, and I had had a handsome settlement for pin-money. My lace surpassed that of any lady of the British Commonalty; and, as far as appearance went, so did my diamonds,—for to a very creditable stock of those precious stones, which my husband had presented me with, my faithful servant, John Aubrey, had on one or two anniversaries of my wedding-day made some valuable contri-

butions, and I, out of my own purse, had added liberally the best specimens of paste which I could obtain in Paris. But the splendid figure I made in the world, and my expensive tastes, appeared neither to arouse astonishment on the part of the world, nor alarm on the part of Mr. Grosvenor Millicent. He had his expenses—good horses, club dinners, and deep play; he was not therefore in a position to scold me for foolishly squandering the income which we both combined to earn; and, to do him justice, he could not be niggardly in pecuniary matters, but showered his money and violence of temper alike on all sides, careless of the consequences and the world! What did that many-headed monster—the world—think? Why, much less about me and my affairs than at that time I was inclined to imagine. It was too busy about its own innumerable vanities to give much heed to mine, although at certain periods it paid me the appropriate attentions of praise, and toil, and admiration. Possibly some of its heads, more cunning than the

others, made silent calculations about the course Mrs. Grosvenor Millicent was running, and the goal to which that course tended; but they did not trouble their neighbours with their gloomy prognostications, and to the greater number of people it seemed only natural that the beautiful, brilliant, accomplished Mrs. Grosvenor Millicent should have a keen relish for the costly enjoyments of life. And why should she not indulge herself in them? It was known that she could make a thousand pounds by a novel, and had been paid three hundred pounds for a song, and that her husband's receipts from the *Fire-fly* were enormous. Surely, then, if any people had a right to a lavish expenditure, the Millicents, without children to provide for, and no cumbrous landed estate with its mortgages, and rent-charges, and pauper tenantry, and ostentatious hall to keep up, were, beyond all others, the happy ones so entitled. So reasoned my charitable friends (fashionable people can be charitable in their way), and so did my

tradesmen, who, as a matter of course, waited years ere they received any of their money, and then were well pleased to take cheques on account and fresh orders in lieu of settlements in full.

I do not like retracing my steps through this contemptible part of my existence. The humiliation of living it was great, but the humiliation of having lived it is greater. I could not summon up enough moral fortitude or shamelessness to enumerate every element of unworthiness which, were I perfectly candid, I should pain my readers with detailing.

I used to wonder what my friends would think and say of me if they knew me thoroughly. For, mingling as I did among the frivolous, I had a reputation for being much better than my neighbours. I never made any pretence of spiritual excellence; indeed I was too prone to wound the feelings of my worthier acquaintance with levity and disregard of sacred things; but my physical beauty went current with the world as moral loveli-

ness, my easy temper was received as active amiability, my frank avowal of the evil of my nature was regarded as charity to my weaker companions; my smiles were virtues, and the rich tones of my voice, first instructed to sing by Caroline Ufford, made me take rank amongst the angels who visit this world by accident. I often, therefore, mused, with no very pleasant sensations, on what revulsions of feeling and opinion my associates would undergo if they were by some unlucky twist of fortune to know me as I really was. And then, as my mind carried on the battle between myself and the world, I turned the attack upon my friends, and debated whether they were not hoaxing me in like manner as I had hoaxed them, whether they had not their legions of social frauds and shams which they dreaded lest I should rout and turn to confusion with my sarcasms; whether, in fact, we were not all rogues alike.

As time went on, my husband and I got farther and farther apart. Had it not been for the revelation which John Aubrey had made

to me, I might have overcome at its earlier stages my repugnance to the man who had shown me kindness when I was at the point of death, and had raised me out of degradation to be his wife. But, knowing what I did, how was I to regard his conduct as being other than cruelly selfish, and despicably deceitful? What right had he to my gratitude, my wifely duty? My beauty and mental fascinations had taken his paltry nature captive! But surely I was not bound to be his uncomplaining slave and adoring victim, because I had inspired him with a passion which I suppose I mayn't call anything else but love. Had not other men loved me? Had not Rawleigh Ufford, though he was of ancient descent, conspicuous for wealth and personal distinctions, and a peer of the proudest *noblesse* in the world? And I might have been Lord Ufford's wife!—the wife of the only man I had ever loved!—had not that mean trickster and dishonest scribbler, Charles Grosvenor Millicent, tricked me with a vile

tissue of frauds,—if he had not lied both to me and to his friend. He had robbed me of all that could be dear to me. He had imposed his hated self into the place which, had he not thrust himself into it, would have been filled by the lord and "captain of my dreams." And, in addition to the animosity I nursed to him for having prevented me, by deceit, from marrying where I loved, I acknowledge—but it costs me a cruel pang to do so—that I entertained a strong sense of mortification when I reflected on all the social advantages which his selfishness and chicanery had debarred me from enjoying. This confession humiliates me more than any I have yet made; it is more galling to my pride than any admission that will appear in the remainder of these pages. But in the name of honesty I make it, and with a glow of shame upon my cheeks I do avow that foiled worldly ambition embittered all the happiness which I might otherwise have extracted from life; and that, day by day, and month by month, the antago-

nism I cherished to the man who had trepanned me increased in strength and in bitterness of aggravation, as at every turn a vision of the wealth, and dignity, and splendour, and lavish display, which would have surrounded me as the wife of Lord Ufford, mocked and maddened me.

I never reproached my husband; he never suspected that I knew the wrong he had done me. I held my tongue, pondering in silence the knowledge I had acquired of his infamy and baseness, and exulting in the superiority which that knowledge, possessed without his cognisance, gave me over him. A vague scheme of —at some time or other—revealing to him my acquaintance with the disinterested nature of his love for me, and of taunting him with his perfidy, haunted me; but I never betrayed my secret. Possibly I was waiting till a period should arrive when it would answer my purpose to speak out. Possibly I, like Mr. Aubrey, was determined not to pluck my fruit till it had thoroughly ripened.

Never again for years—after once making his extraordinary disclosure—did John Aubrey allude to the loss I had sustained by my husband's craftiness. But he well knew words of his were powerless to add one drop of venom to the resentment I entertained towards my deceiver. He did not guess at the good, but he knew intimately the bad of my nature, and he rested assured that, however calm might be my exterior, however radiant my beauty, and however pleasant my voice, the memory of my wrongs lay rankling and festering at my heart's core.

Rawleigh Ufford continued to live on the Continent. The rank and wealth acquired by his uncle's death and will did not bring him to England. At Paris, at Rome, at Florence, at Vienna, and in the South of Spain, he led that life of refined indolence and polite sensuousness which so many of England's more gifted children, spoilt by a too benignant fortune, have indulged in. The society of his own country ceased to care for him; having

withdrawn himself from its pomp and changing splendour, he was soon forgotten; and, ere he had been four years a Peer of the Realm, his name was hardly ever alluded to in public, unless a Chartist demagogue, on the hustings or in a republican journal, singled him out as an instance of a corrupt aristocracy squandering in foreign countries the wealth wrung from the toiling multitudes of their own land. He never sent me any notification of his proceedings, or his existence. At certain times—such as the anniversaries of my wedding-day, or our meeting at Paris, or the first occasion of his befriending me by the sea-shore—with a foolish, vain, expectant heart, I thought he might send me some memorial of his affection for me—a trinket, a picture, a letter, a lock of hair. But such a token of his recollection of me never reached me. Apparently, he had conquered his wayward, unaccountable sentiment for me. Possibly, he had altogether forgotten me. Often—oftener than for good resolves broken, and fair dreams of well-doing dissipated

by the temptations of the world—I shed bitter tears over subduing thoughts of what I might have been to him, and he to me, and repeated in my trouble, "Oh, that I could forget him too!—that I could forget him too!"

I had been married eight years when events took place which materially affected my plans of life. Mr. Millicent told me one morning, abruptly, that *the Fire-fly* had been going down rapidly in its circulation during the previous six months, and that he was much annoyed by its manifest decline in popular favour. The fact was, the period had arrived when all the subjects for wholesale abuse and ridicule had been exhausted, and when, moreover, the public had become weary of the acrimony and injustice in which, against the better dictates of their hearts, they had for a long season indulged. The rival papers were good-humouredly publishing returns of the number of times Macaulay, Sir Robert Peel, and such like men, had been "cut up" in the *Fire-fly*. All the heroes of mark had been killed over

and over again; and if more Richmonds had appeared on the field, ambitious of slaughter, the mob would not have cared to see them mutilated. The season for bull-fights was over, the spectators were sated with blood, and the arena was fast being deserted by its patrons.

I did not fret much at my husband's announcement; for I had contracted a certain recklessness in regard to pecuniary affairs, so that I never allowed them to weigh upon my spirits. Suppose the receipts of the *Fire-fly* were diminished, still something of the profits, say a-half or a-quarter, would be left; I could win another 1,000*l.* in the next year by my pen; and surely some of the speculations my husband had embarked in in the City, under Mr. Aubrey's guidance, would turn out well. And, if the worst came to the worst, and we had for a time to give up our establishment and go abroad, why, with our powerful friends, we should not be long without something in the way of an adequate

income. I was just enough disturbed by my husband's intelligence about the *Fire-fly*, to take this general view of our position; but I did not experience for a moment any panic or dread of calamity. Much as I had known of poverty, I had learnt little of the exact value of money. The large income, to a participation in which my marriage and the success of my own writings had raised me, appeared to me as almost inexhaustible; and, as we had no country-house and no children, it never occurred to me that we had any necessity to practise economy. I was extravagant without knowing it. We were in debt—who isn't? I had a good many little bills that I had never spoken of to my husband, bills that he possibly knew nothing about, perhaps amounting in all to 1,500*l.* or 2,000*l.*,—but what lady of my rank hadn't a few small incumbrances? Doubtless my husband had his private liabilities of which I was ignorant. If he hadn't, he was a wonderfully clever manager. Certainly *debt* was a disagreeable, perilous, ignoble state

of things; but *credit* was the very soul of commerce, and the main-spring of our national greatness; and surely they were only two different names for the same thing. "And a thing," I argued logically to Lady Albatross, "can't be altered by simply giving it another name."

"Indeed," replied her ladyship, "I don't think you are right. My husband, I suppose, is the same man who was my lover; but the change of title has affected him wonderfully."

The irritation which my husband had manifested, over and above his ordinary tetchiness, during the few weeks immediately following his communication about the *Fire-fly's* lapse in public favour, passed away, and so also, by all appearances, did the pecuniary pressure under which he had then smarted. A large dividend had been paid to the shareholders of the Caucasian Coal Company, of which noble speculation he had been a projector; and, as a consequence of this unlooked-for distribution, Mr.

Grosvenor Millicent received a heavy cheque, and was enabled to dispose, on most advantageous terms, of some of his shares, which flew up to a premium of 50 per cent. Some other schemes in which he was concerned turned out well just now (at least, he told me so); and, instead of making the retrenchments in our style of living which he had more than once sullenly threatened, he seemed inclined to enter on fresh expenses. My carriage, which I had driven for three seasons, and which certainly was getting shabby, he replaced by a new one, made for a distinguished member of the royal household, and bought in Long Acre for a large sum. About this time also he presented me with a costly set of pearls, which I really did not want or prize, as I had jewelry enough and to spare, and the esteem in which I held the giver gave no additional value to the gift; and one day, on my hinting to him that I was in straits for money, through being disappointed in some negociations I had had with a publishing firm, he in

the kindest possible style told me that he had resolved to double the small allowance he had hitherto made me for pin-money, and, as an earnest that he meant to act up to his generous promises, he took out his pocket-book, and passed over the table to me notes for the first quarter. I was staggered by such liberality. I rallied him upon it, and asked him what valley of diamonds he had inherited, that he could dispense wealth with so lavish a hand. He attempted to respond in the same tone of banter; laughed about his royal prodigality; hastily explained to me what a large sum he had made by the sale of his Caucasian shares; and, with much confusion of countenance and speech, enlarged on the good services that John Aubrey had done him. Then he paused suddenly; and after sitting in silence for more than a minute, he came over to my side of the breakfast-room, and taking hold of my hand kissed it fervently, and with a burst of weak, unmanly tenderness, indescribably painful to witness, he spoke in passionate terms of

my excellencies, the forbearance and devotion and unwearied love I had displayed to him as his wife, the patience with which I had borne his unkindness, the gentleness with which I had always repaid his harshness; he talked of his unworthiness of me, and hinted, in mysterious language, the significance of which I appreciated better than he thought, at the injury he had done me by making me his wife.

"Miriam," he said, "amongst all my cares and painful reflections, the saddest, the most abiding, the most unaccountable, *you* will say the most foolish, is a conviction that you would have been a happier woman if you had never become my wife."

He left the room that he might master his emotion in solitude; and—ay, and I am not ashamed to confess it—for this outbreak of remorse and maudlin commiseration the heart of his victim burned to him with greater hate than ever.

Our intercourse for the next year was in

some respects more harmonious than it had been for years before. We had fewer bickerings or contentions, and no intemperate reproaches. He not only forbore from paining me by his violence of temper, but manifested an eager anxiety to please me, to rekindle in my mind the warm sentiments that he well knew had long become cold, to win me back to his heart. He caressed me, flattered me, petted me, with the same assiduity and delicacy of care that he had gratified me with in his lover-days. Looking back on his conduct, it seems to me that he must have been actuated by a superstitious feeling that in retaining a remnant of my old tenderness for him he would hold that which, in the eyes of man and God, would atone for grave faults and terrible crimes.

Reflecting on all that occurred at this period, I sometimes almost feel confident that a vague presentiment of coming catastrophe hung over me, and that occurrences forewarning me of the approaching storm were

frequent in my path; indeed, I often find it very difficult to persuade myself that this was not the case; but in my calmer moments, when my judgment is not swayed by the superstitions of memory, I know that when the final disaster came, it burst on me like a thunder-clap, and that I was as unprepared for it as most people are for death. All that year I lived in my ordinary way of excitement and diversity of toil and pleasure. I wrote much for magazines, and published another novel; I went much into society, where I had never been more flattered, and admired, and sought after. My external life was the same as heretofore, and I lived in it as heretofore.

This was the year in which Geraldine Aubrey died. Almost to the last she kept about, resolutely simulating the lightness of heart which she had revelled in during the brief years of her girlhood. There was a fine and truly admirable courage in that poor little creature; but her frame was slight and delicately knit, and there was an anguish

gnawing into the fibres of her heart, strong enough in its corrosive power to have killed a Stoic Hercules. I watched with a heavy sorrow the lines deepen in her soft cheeks, and the colour fly from them, and the round beauty vanish from her taper fingers, and waxen arms, and pliant figure; and I noted the premature employment of artifice to conceal from crowds, who felt no interest in the matter, the ravages of bodily disease and mental disquiet. I was a woman, though a bad one, with the weakness as well as cruelty of a woman; and it cost me tears more than once to think of that young thing—little more than thirty years of age—driven to the rouge-pot and laudanum-bottle—not the beads and prayer-books—of age.

She went to her country-house in July. I saw her dancing amidst the gayest at a great duchess's ball in the beginning of that month, but I never looked upon her again. Information was sent me that she was ill, that she was worse, that the physicians who had been

summoned from town despaired of her recovery; then there was a delay of two months, during which she made a tedious pilgrimage in the valley of the shadow of death; and then, in the cold, chill, murky autumn, news was transmitted to me that she was no more.

Ten days after her death, John Aubrey called upon me in London, where I was for a few days between the conclusion of a visit in Devonshire and a trip to Rossmorton Castle. He brought a sealed note from Geraldine, which he had promised her to give me. I broke the seal in his presence, and read her brief farewell:—"Forgive me, even as I have forgiven you!" This was the entire epistle.

"John Aubrey," said I, in a hoarse, deep voice, "she was your victim and mine,—but now she is stronger than either of us."

## CHAPTER IV.

### JUDICIAL SEPARATION.

I PAID my visit to Rossmorton Castle, and returned to London for the Christmas week to entertain some of my husband's less fortunate professional friends. That office of hospitality performed, I went to Cliftbridge, to join in the New Year's festivities given by Lord Thorpe.

It was while I was sojourning at Cliftbridge that I received the blow which has already been hinted at. I was breakfasting in bed after a ball on the previous night, when my maid entered and put on the table by my side the letters and newspapers which had arrived

for me by that morning's post. The letters were of no great importance. My milliner begged for a cheque of 100*l*. A Transatlantic admirer wanted my autograph; the editor of a magazine complained in a honeyed strain that I had not supplied him with some promised "copy;" an upholsterer sued for my patronage; and half-a-dozen different people implored me to become their guest in various parts of the country before the setting in of the next London season. It did not take me long to read such notes as these, and when I had rapidly conned them I took from three papers that awaited my attention the most liberal one, and consequently the one most likely to give me some good suggestions for my articles in a Tory journal to which I had begun to contribute.

I tore off the paper bandage, and the first thing that greeted my eyes in the middle sheet of the paper was the following announcement in large, staring type:—"Failure of the Caucasian Coal Company, and Enormous Frauds of the Managing Director, Charles Grosvenor

Millicent." Here was the reason, then, that my husband had not written to me, and transmitted me money according to promise. I read on, my brain swimming round and round and my eyes seeing double. It did not appear that the failure of the Caucasian Coal Company, and the consequent suffering entailed on its miserable shareholders, were either attributable to, or in any way connected with, the frauds of Charles Grosvenor Millicent, and I had to read through a harrowing description of the affairs of the Company, before I arrived at the case of the individual in whom I was especially interested, and whose exposure had been coupled with that of the speculation solely for the sake of making "a strong heading" to the principal intelligence.

It was the old story of a forged acceptance. The weak, unprincipled man had drawn a bill, forged the acceptance, and had it discounted. Of course he had intended to wrong nobody; of course he had intended taking the bill up long before it became due,—that's always the

case with poor rogues, whatever source they draw on for supplies, whether it be on a great maker of money, or the Great General Joint-Stock Bank of Spiritual Excellence,—and whoever the dupe may be who cashes the fictitious letter of credit, whether it be little Levi of Pounce Court, or some sanctimonious representative of Universal Credulity and Co., who are always ready to discount high-sounding professions on the most liberal terms. But, like many other fraudulent drawers on banks, pecuniary and moral, Mr. Grosvenor Millicent had not been able to satisfy the holder of the bill with the forged acceptance, and, this fact being clearly established, the officers for the maintenance of public morality and commercial security came down upon him and punished him, as about one rogue in a hundred is punished.

The excitement in court, the penny-a-liner assured his readers, was *tremendous*. The avenues leading to it were blocked up with persons anxious but unable to obtain admis-

sion. The prisoner, who was editor and sole proprietor of the *Fire-fly*, and a barrister well known in circles of the highest fashion, was evidently much affected by his ignominious position; he was very pale and agitated, and frequently shaded his eyes with his hands; he was of imposing appearance, and wore light grey trousers, a blue coat with a velvet collar, and straw-coloured kid gloves, and held in his hands a valuable cane with a gold handle. The forged bill was for 2,000*l.*, was drawn on Stubbs and Buddlewash, and was held by Hoffmeister and Linkinwater. The prisoner had been apprehended at Dover with 500*l.* on his person, and had gone there evidently with the intention of escaping to France. Great credit was due to Inspector Andrews of Bow Street for the alacrity with which he had got on the culprit's track, and the decision he had displayed in all his arrangements. The prisoner, on being asked if he wished to say anything, briefly observed that he had not intended to injure Messrs. Hoffmeister and

Linkinwater, and that his inability to take up the bill was in consequence of the disastrous condition of the Caucasian Coal Company; and he moreover added with astounding effrontery that Messrs. Hoffmeister and Linkinwater knew at the time of giving him their 1,800*l.* that the signature of Stubbs and Buddlewash was not genuine. At this period of the proceedings, information having been received that other bills drawn by the prisoner, some of them on eminent persons, such as Lord Ufford, and the renowned capitalist John Aubrey, Esq., were in the hands of various discount-houses in the City, the Lord Mayor decided on remanding the case for a week. Bail was applied for, but was immediately and emphatically refused by his lordship, and the prisoner was removed under the vigilant custody of Sprouts, the celebrated turnkey!

I turned from the paper first opened to another, and from that to a third. They all contained the news, and each had an article on it; but nowhere was there any allusion to me,

and I felt sincerely grateful to the journalists for this exercise of delicate consideration and forbearance. When my maid re-entered the room, I saw in her countenance that she had heard the intelligence, and that consequently all the domestics of the place were on fire with it. I turned away from her gaze, and hid my face in the coverlet. I do not think I ever before felt so acutely the anguish of abasement and humiliation as I did for a few brief seconds under the silent observation of my servant. But she soon relieved me from that element in my distress. Kneeling down by my bedside, the dear, good girl begged me to pardon her for intruding on me in my sorrow, but she couldn't keep away from me; she was sure that it was all wrong about her master, and that his innocence would be proved, "and if not, that could make no difference in me: I could not help it, it was my misfortune," and she vowed enthusiastically that, as long as she had my permission to be near me, she would never leave me, but would

serve me better in duty and devotion than ever she had done before, whatever might be the reverses of fortune which I should have to endure; she did not want wages, for she had saved money, and when that was done she could earn her own living, and yet keep near me. And then the gentle creature, seeing I was moved by her sweet voice and noble generosity, came nearer to me, and I kissed her fondly on the face many times, calling her "my own dear and only friend," and she (Heaven protect her loving nature!) wept out more tears for me than I, in the whole course of my life, had ever shed for anything but myself. I will not detract from the good breeding of my friends of the great world by hinting that I either found, or expected to find, such disinterested sympathy in them.

I did not leave my private apartments on that day or the two following ones. The gaiety in my absence went on much the same as if I had contributed to it; the ladies had their flirtations morning and evening, and the

men made up their shooting-parties, without troubling themselves in any disagreeable fashion about my woes. The county hunt met according to appointment, and from my gloomy chamber I looked across the sunny park, at the clean painted dogs, the crowds of servants sauntering about in charge of led horses, the well-appointed equestrians of both sexes, and, in the distance, carriages full of children and timid mothers, and I remembered feeling that it was something more than unkind, indeed almost cruel, that the landscape and all the living things that peopled it should be so cheerful and lovely, while I was so sad.

My good host and hostess were very delicate in their attentions to me. Lord Thorpe urged me to keep quiet till I should hear from my husband, and, though compliance was somewhat against my will, I consented to follow his advice, and remained for thrice twenty-four hours at Cliftbridge, waiting anxiously the arrival of the posts, and trusting that each would bring me a letter from Mr. Millicent.

But no communication from him came; and at the expiration of three days I started for London, and arrived there after three more days' posting.

When I reached London, I drove straight to my house, and, without daring to return the greeting of the servants, who congregated in the hall and stared at me as if I had been an intruder, I hurried to my private room, attended by my faithful maid. The newspapers for the evening had just come in and had been placed on the table, and I learned from them that the extent to which my husband had raised money on forged acceptances was far greater than had at first been expected, and that he had been committed for trial on evidence that established beyond a shadow of doubt his guilt. As soon as I ascertained this, I wrote him a note briefly informing him that I had returned to London in consequence of his painful position, and that I should be happy to call upon him the next day if he wished to have an interview with me. I despatched this note

immediately it was written, but I had to wait an entire day before I received an answer, and when it came it was of such a kind that it did not afford me much comfort. The only reply Charles Millicent made consisted of the following curt, flippant, and harsh words :—

"Dear M., look after yourself, and leave me to my fate. I don't mean to be anxious about you, for to take care of yourself is an art you well understand. If you don't like the present consequences of your connection with me, be just, and own that in some respects our marriage has not been a losing bargain to you. I should advise you to keep quiet for a short time, and, when this affair has blown over, see if your pen wont supply you with the means of a living as heretofore. If this resource should fail you, why not try the stage? why not the opera? You are old to begin that sort of thing; but I don't see why you should not yet live to star it as a *prima donna.* As for me, dismiss me from your thoughts. I don't wish to see you. More

than once in my life I have had to practise stoicism, and I mean to practise it now. Farewell.—Charles Millicent."

It was the letter of a worse man than I had, with all my animosity to him, believed him to be; and in the manifestation which it contained of his extreme badness I found a few grains of consolation. I was glad that he had expressed no contrition to, or tenderness for, the wife he had wronged, that he had thrown me from him as a toy that could no longer amuse him, without one expression of regret or compassion. Had he, instead of adopting this brutal strain, appealed to my generosity, he might possibly have kept a hold over me that would have caused me lasting embarrassment. He was a mean, dishonest, selfish man; that I had long known; and now, for the first time, he had declared himself careless of my love, and had liberated me from my vows of duty.

The only visitor I had for ten days was John Aubrey. He came regularly to me every day, and communicated to me all the

fresh particulars that came to light with regard to my husband's frauds. I need not weary my readers with every item in this long story of crime; they have all lived through 1857 and 1858, reading *The Times* and taking their views of life from other parts of it than the leading articles, and are familiar enough with the modes by which polite and philanthropic gentlemen give their hands to picking and stealing. Besides bringing me the information which, deeply as it humiliated me, I thirsted for, John Aubrey gave me more real comfort than perhaps any other person living could have done just then. In his presence I did not suffer under that abject sense of degradation which I should have experienced in that of one whose career did not in some respects resemble my own. He and I had both been servants; we were both the keepers of each other's secrets; we had plotted together successfully and unsuccessfully; and, whatever the respect we mutually entertained for each other was, it certainly did not arise from any

high moral sense, or delicacy of honour, we supposed to exist in each other.

"Do you not think you would like to have the unpleasant thoughts in which you have lived for some days past aroused by a little intercourse with the world?" John Aubrey inquired of me on the tenth day after my return to London.

"Who is it you would have me see?"

"Your friends."

"They do not trouble themselves to call on me. I have none."

"Come, come,—you are not so desolate as that."

"*You* have been very kind to me."

"And so will others. When this unhappy affair has passed over, you will have friends. Thank God, nothing he has done can implicate you! You are still young,—just thirty years old,—more beautiful than any woman living, more accomplished, more fascinating. A brilliant career will still be yours. Rely on me as a true prophet."

This seemed to me eminently absurd, but it was flattery—and therefore pleasant.

"From what source do you get your inspiration?" I asked.

"Possibly from one you would not think slightingly of."

He saw, perhaps, a cloud cross my face, indicating that a vain woman might sometimes be too sad for adulatory badinage, for he changed his tone to one of gravity as he proceeded :—

"I was talking to an old friend of yours last night, and his words inspired me to speak as I have just now done. He is my oracle. He was in the South of France when the intelligence of your calamity reached him; but directly he heard it, he started for England and travelled night and day till he reached London. He has been in town three days, and in communication with me all that time, but he has not yet found courage to see you, fearing that you might misconstrue—that you might be offended with—his appearance. He

fears you may think him officious, and presuming too much on an old friendship."

"Who is he?" I gasped, changing colour, and feeling a suffocating faintness take possession of me. "No, no—you needn't tell me—it is—it is Lord Ufford."

"You are right, Miriam Copley. He is in London, and implores you to give him an interview."

That evening Lord Ufford visited me.

It was almost ten years since I had seen him, and those ten years had made great alterations in his personal appearance. He was no longer a young man, but at least forty-five or forty-six years of age; his once black locks were sparingly scattered with white lines, the eye-brows (still black) had grown large and almost shaggy, but the same large lustrous eyes—poetic, thoughtful, earnest, of deep violet hue—looked out from under them, unchanged. His figure had grown portly and less graceful, and his features had hardened and wore a sterner expression. For two or

three lightning seconds, I experienced pain as I looked upon him—robbed of the fresh bloom and exquisite delicacy with which my memory and my imagination had endowed him; but as he advanced across the room to me with an extended hand, his lips moved, and the old heart-warming smile rose into his face, and the old God-like charm overspread him.

"It does not surprise me, Lord Ufford, to see you here, for, now all the world shows itself ready to desert me, it seems but natural that you come with speed from a foreign country to help and comfort me. I cannot thank you—you know I cannot."

I said much more than this, uttering my words quickly and with confusion, and making innumerable vain repetitions in my futile attempt to tell him how highly I appreciated his sympathy.

"Yes — yes — my dear girl — my pretty child," he said, calling me "child" and "girl," just as if scarce a month had elapsed since our first meeting with each other, "I understand

what you would say. The tongue is an awkward servant to an earnest heart. Come, sit down here by me; talk of what you will—your troubles: or, if you had rather look away from them, let us speak of something else."

"Have you seen *him?*" I inquired. "He will not see me. Since my first offer to visit him, I have thrice begged him to let me have an interview with him; but he has ordered me not to approach him."

"I have seen him. Poor fellow! He was once my friend; and, though he has strangely altered since we were young fellows together, I would help him in any way in my power—but here I am powerless."

"Did he speak of me?"

"Yes, and in some respects with much good feeling. He begs you to forgive him for all the suffering he has brought upon you, and wishes you to know that he desires you may not visit him, simply because he could not support the agonizing reproach which your mere presence would be to him. He says you have been to

him as good a wife as he has been to you a bad husband."

I was softened by this assurance, and my thoughts reverted to the vein of goodness in that wretched, undone man. I remembered his violent agitation on the night, years ago, when in his chambers in New Inn, he had spoken of his sinful tendencies, and the death of his heart-broken mother.

"I would do anything for him. Is there no service I can render him?" I asked.

"He has bade me be the bearer to you of his last petition, and he humbly entreats you to grant it him, and so for the last time exercise your wifely obedience to him. He trusts you will confide yourself to my care, that you will be guided by me on all those occasions when you feel need of counsel and assistance. Allow me to assure him that you will observe this his last request. You see, Miriam, there were one or two little matters of grievance between myself and him; he had, poor fellow, made an improper use of my name, on

one or two occasions, as you have learnt from the papers; and there were other subjects of disagreement between us. Well, I spoke as consolingly to him as I could, and conjured him not to be unreasonably sorrowful for any little wrongs he might have done me; and he was so affected by my way of treating him that he cancelled all the wretched debit and credit accounts there might be between us by begging me to watch over you. Say, will you let me be your guardian? Dare you trust yourself to me?"

I put my hand in his, and, looking up into his tearful eyes, in which there was something of anxiety, as though he feared his offer would be rejected, I said, "Lord Ufford, from this day forth I will do in everything your bidding. You shall ask of me nothing which I will refuse, or hesitate to give you. Your word shall be law to me. I will no longer think or act for myself; I am weary of self-reliance. Relieve me of the burden of myself, and let me live in you."

I spoke this slowly and solemnly; with no tumultuous feelings, but with a calm and deeply-abiding recognition of the fact that, in uttering these words, I was deliberately making a vow more sacred and awful than any I had, of my own free will, made in the whole of my life.

"Nay, nay," he answered, smiling, "you will frighten me if you put so great a responsibility on me. I shall often need you to counsel me, and shall beg you to do so."

"No," said I, "you may not do that. People have flattered me for years on the strength, and clearness, and courage of my mind; but those of them who have been sincere have failed to understand me. I am only a woman, and I would not have you think my wit has unsexed me. Possibly I have defied ordinary rules and government, but now I have found my ruler—and he will find me a submissive subject."

"But if I order you to do what is wrong?"

"The sin will be yours; but I shall be blameless so long as I obey implicitly."

This was not badinage. I did not speak from any vain or foolish motive, but sincerely, and because I felt in my inmost soul a strange gladness, the like of which I had never before experienced, in surrendering myself to the master who had come to claim me.

Lord Ufford induced me to leave London with him immediately, and he conveyed me to the house of Lady Ashby, in Surrey, who was one of his oldest and most tried friends, and received me with maternal solicitude. She was a widow lady of confined income, whose husband, Sir Ralph Ashby, had been killed in service in the East, twelve years before the time of which we are now speaking, and whose only children—two sons, distinguished, like their father, in the military profession—were with their regiments in remote quarters of the globe. Lady Ashby was a person of an enlarged understanding, and a nature generous, highly-toned, and deeply imbued with religious

sentiment. Benevolence was to her not an effort, or *a cause* to be talked about in puritanical phraseology, but an inseparable condition of her existence. She and I had never met before, but she was familiar with my books, and liked them, and had formed from them a high estimate of my better qualities. When, therefore, Lord Ufford mentioned to her the deplorable condition to which I was reduced, she promptly, and in a manner that displayed the most delicate regard to my feelings, suggested that I should, for a time, reside under the shadow of her protection. Her offer was the natural language of her sympathizing heart; she knew exactly the nature of the obligation she proposed to confer on me—*countenance* at a critical moment, when lukewarm friends would turn aside from me, and detraction would do its worst to destroy my reputation, and *cherishing care* at a time when my life *without* was uncertainty, and confusion, and disgrace, and *within* consisted of the bitterness of humiliation. She

knew that my only chance of retaining the respect of the world, or, in case I for a time lost it, of eventually recovering it, depended on my having a friend of my own sex, of mature years, and of indisputably high reputation as well as influence, coming forward and shielding me from the cruelty of those mean assailants whom my reverse of fortune was sure to call into existence.

For several weeks I remained in the seclusion of Lady Ashby's house, forming a strong and lasting attachment to that noble woman, and receiving almost daily visits from Lord Ufford. He and my hostess determined to divert my thoughts as much as possible from the distressing subject to which of necessity they were principally directed. They abstained from discussing it with me, and from making any allusion to the wretched man who was awaiting his trial in prison; and I, though at times rendered uneasy by the tacit restraint under which I was put with regard to this question, submitted to their wishes.

Sometimes, when I asked if the morning papers had arrived, Lady Ashby would say in a significant manner, "No, my dear,—no papers to-day. They wont come to-day. That is—they will not—unless you wish." And I would on such occasions reply meekly, "No —no—I do not wish to see them. You had best decide for me."

They were sad and dreary weeks, but they were beneficial to me. I lost by degrees my sense of animosity to the world. I became gentler, more resigned, more unselfish in my way of regarding the particulars of my sorrow. At times I thought of my husband tenderly, pitifully, and forgivingly. I wrote to him once more, and in my letter suggested to him every consideration that could be likely to comfort him, and he answered in a softened, but manly mode, begging me to do my utmost to forget him, but at the same time assuring me that he should never cease to think of me with affection.

A short time after this correspondence, Lord

Ufford stayed away from me for four entire days; and, as during those four days I was not allowed to see a paper, I was at no great difficulty to conjecture the cause of his lordship's absence. It was at an early hour on the fifth day he presented himself before me; and I saw at a glance, by the pallor and dejection of his countenance, that he had no good news to impart. He raised one of my hands to his lips, and looked with more than his usual tenderness at me, and essayed to speak—but could not.

"It is all over?" I asked.

"All over!" was the answer.

"Tell me what it is."

"The worst—the severest sentence."

"What?—No?—not death?"

"No,—that sentence does not exist now. Would to God it were that!"

"Then what is it?"

"Banishment and slavery for life."

We were silent for some minutes, during which no tears started in my eyes, but, stunned

by the blow for which I had been so long waiting, I remained scarcely sensible of the full signification of the words. Soon, however, all their meaning burst upon me—the terrible fate of the wretched man, and the scarcely less terrible fate of myself, a convict's wife, debarred from the possibility of ever uniting myself to the man I honoured and loved, so long as the miserable victim of insulted justice should survive.

"Oh, Lord Ufford," I said, as the tears began to roll fast down my cheeks, "years since I gave myself to that man to love, serve, honour, and obey him—until death should us part. And now, not *Death*, but *Life* has separated us. I am both wife and widow,—*his widow, but still his wife!*"

## CHAPTER V.

### WIDOWED WIFE.

We left the gossiping life of England for a while, and in a Continental trip, lasting about six months, we sought change of scene, and thought, and spirits. Lady Ashby kindly consented to accompany me, and give me all the protection and countenance she could have afforded to her own daughter; and Lord Ufford returned her goodness to me by displaying to her an affection amounting to filial devotion.

We did not stop long in the same place, anywhere; but made our arrangements so as to be continually on the move to see some-

thing of note, or to be present at some ceremony of interest; and, as soon as one object had been attained, we proposed another, and forthwith pursued it. We found our way to Rome, and, after three delightful weeks in the Holy Father of Christian cities, we visited Florence and Venice. Distraction of mind was the end to be attained, and certainly our purpose was achieved; and when it was evident that the desired result had been arrived at, Lord Ufford determined that he would return to England.

He was tired of Continental life, and resolved to make a fresh start in his own country. He would enter once more into political life, and reside a considerable portion of each year on his estate, which he had hitherto neglected. His tenantry and dependents should know him as a friend, and learn that an absentee nobleman might, notwithstanding a long residence in foreign countries, keep an English heart in his breast. With this plan uppermost in his mind, he set

to work examining me cautiously, so that I should not suspect what he was after, as to the state of my feelings with regard to the English county in which my childhood had passed; and when he found that, instead of wishing never to re-enter it, as the scene of my early suffering and poverty, I was well inclined to visit it again and renew the associations of dimly-remembered days, he proposed to me that I, attended by Lady Ashby, who had already signified her readiness to participate in the scheme, should fix myself permanently somewhere in the neighbourhood of Aldeburgh, and be his near and intimate neighbour, while he exercised at Linton a hospitality befitting his position. I was well pleased with the proposition. Conspicuous and unusual as my life had been, I knew that it would be the height of folly for me to wish for a residence where I should enjoy immunity from the gossip and observation of idle people, for the place was not to be found where my story either was not known, or would not be

known immediately I settled in it. It struck me that, in all probability, I should be freer from impertinent rumour and comment in the very neighbourhood where I had been born a peasant's daughter than anywhere else. Possibly old Mrs. Cookesley, of the George Inn, and two or three other people might recognise me, but respect to Lord Ufford would make them careful in communicating their knowledge or suspicions to others; and, even if my whole history should be ferreted up by the curious district,—what would it matter? It was enough that Lord Ufford would like it, for me to resolve on giving in my warm adhesion to the plan. So I told him, truly, that all places were the same to me, so long as I should have the pleasure of seeing him frequently. Only any proposition involving my reappearance in London society for many years would be displeasing to me.

He said he fully concurred with me in this feeling; and we went on to discuss what style of residence I should like best for a permanent

occupation, or rather, he asked me (for it was he who led the conversation), was there any place in the neighbourhood of Linton that I entertained a positive dislike to? Doubtless I looked astonished at this question, for it perplexed me, and I could not conjecture what my companion meant.

"Do you remember Braden Manor?"

"Yes, certainly—it is my ideal of an English gentleman's residence. Does Lady Cheveley inhabit it since her marriage with Prince Partelli?"

"Oh, no!" he answered, with a blush, the simplicity of which amused me; "she has adopted the country of her second husband and has become an Italian in every respect. I don't think she has a coin of English money; certainly she has not an acre of English land."

"What? Do you mean that she has sold Braden Manor?"

"Ay—and I bought it five or six years since. I had to pay a saucy price for it; but the gem is mine now,—or, rather, I should

say *the casket* is mine. I want to put *a gem* in it. Now if you would establish yourself there, and make Braden Manor live again with healthy human music, I should see a good reason why I ought to enjoy the prospect of turning myself into a respectable country gentleman at Linton."

"What, Lord Ufford!" I asked sadly, "with all your cheerfulness of manner, and benevolence, has life no interest for you, except what you can extract from completing and touching up an old picture of the past?"

"A picture of the past!" he repeated with some slight embarrassment, which passed away as he continued with unusual earnestness, as if he were pleading a cause with me; "no, not a picture, or anything else of the past! 'Tis *reality* that I want, not semblance,—and if I do amuse myself at any time with semblances, have pity on my weakness, and allow me to believe that my plait of straw is a crown, and my ragged wand a sceptre. If the poor crazed patient is happy, and doesn't make too much

noise, leave him alone in his delusions; 'tis most prudent to do so, for if you wrest from him those that are harmless, he may take into his mad brain others that are more dangerous. And don't despise him, for, after all, what is the great difference between his semblances and your facts?—possibly, nothing; possibly something that tells in favour of him, and against you. But this time it is not a picture I want, but a fact (if a cheery, polished English home is a fact), and one, moreover, not relating to the past, but altogether of the present, save where it points to, and is prophetic of, a yet happier future. Miriam, do be a good girl, and comply with my humour. I want to see you at Braden, one of my own home circle. Are you so proud, Miriam, that you wont let me love you in my own way? It's a way I can't help, for it's of the past. And you may not laugh at or rally me about the past, for that is an account made up for both of us, and not to be cancelled. But the present, under the conditions put on it by the past,

—and the future, such as the present, rightly used, may make it,—are ours to enjoy or to hope for. Dear girl, be satisfied with the present, and, as far as I am concerned, don't examine it too closely. You know my heart is all yours. If you value it, if it has beauty for you, if you love me, take it. Never mind how it was made; be contented with what it is, and show it at least as much generosity as you would a flower in your garden, which you would pluck and enjoy, without prying into its physiology."

"Don't be so earnest," I said, frightened by the unusual fervour of his language, and yet, in my timidity, having courage enough to let my smile confess my deep love for him; "and don't imagine that the honesty and forbearance are to be all on one side. I wont defraud you of your whim, and you mayn't plunder me of my vocabulary. You shall have your *picture*, but you must permit me to call it so. And, Lord Ufford, you misjudge me if you imagine I could disdain any regard of yours. It is enough for me to know that you love me;

and, since it is your pleasure to love *thus*, it seems to me I am prouder of being *thus* loved, than I could be of any other fashion of your affection."

So then it was fixed; and, ere another six weeks had passed over our heads, I and Lady Ashby had settled ourselves at Braden Manor.

We thought it best that Lady Ashby should appear in the county as the head of the establishment, and that it should be generally understood that she had taken possession of the Manor, so that she might be in the immediate neighbourhood of her intimate friend, Lord Ufford, who intended henceforth for the greater portion of each year to reside in the county.

To avoid unnecessarily arousing the curiosity and scandal of the district, I dropped the notorious and ill-omened name which my husband had borne, and assumed that of Maitland. I was announced as Mrs. Maitland, a widow niece of Lady Ashby's; and both I and my kind companion took pains to let it be known,

far and near, that it was our wish to lead a very retired life.

When I left, as a servant, the province in which I was born, I had not expected to return to it as the mistress of one of its most imposing mansions—least of all of that very mansion in which I had been entertained by Augusta Wingfield; but such was the fashion in which my destiny had shaped itself. Yes, the fair domain of Braden Manor and all that appertained to it were mine—its undulating park and mimic lake, its avenues of oak and walnut, the very house from the gabled roof from which, long years ago, I had seen the banner of the Wingfields rise up slowly and unfold against the blue summer sky; its deer herding together under the gigantic timber; the same terraces covered with fine turf and brilliant flowers that I had then looked at with astonishment and delight; the same sombre skirtings of dark yew and darker cedar; the same statues, from the antique masters; the same flashing fountains rippling and ring-

ing out their music in marble basins; the same imposing hall with its suits of armour and trophies of a lost chivalry; the same galleries and corridors with their walls of old oak wainscot breathing with the silent life of the self-same portraits. This was the casket in which I had been placed.

The full-length portrait of Braden's former mistress still hung in its old place; and, as I looked at all the ingredients of its exquisite loveliness—the tall, slight figure, the rounded shoulders, the long taper neck, the delicate but marked outline of the small oval face, the intensely thoughtful black eyes, and the rich profusion of lustrous hair,—and then, turning to a mirror, marked how little alteration time had effected in me, how much the woman of thirty resembled the girl of twenty, I felt no jealousy of that rare creature, "a daughter of God's—divinely tall, and most divinely fair," whose likeness I had been watching; I cherished no malevolence or petty resentment of any kind, that she, in respect of time, should be first and I

second ; indeed, I felt something of gratitude to her for having so influenced the heart of her lover, that in the fulness of time he could love none but me. Truly had I said to Lord Ufford, I cared not why, or how, or to what end he loved me,—it was enough for me to know that he did love me.

When a great man establishes himself anywhere, he is not long a stranger to the smaller personages around him. The return of Lord Ufford to his county, which since his accession to the estates and title of his family he had visited but once, and then only for a few days, was no sooner announced than the county families hastened to Linton to pay him their respects, and assure him of their gladness at the prospect of having the head of the Uffords once more a permanent resident amongst them. Ere twelve months had elapsed, Lord Ufford had recovered all the influence and prestige which his protracted exile had for a time deprived him of. Doubtless the ease with which he acquired an enthusiastic popularity amongst

all classes of his neighbours, the great landed proprietors, the yeomanry, and the farmers, depended in a great measure on his grand bearing, and on the fact that in all the eccentricities and follies of his outlandish life he had retained his boyhood's passion for those national sports which, as long as the inhabitants of Great Britain are the leading and dominant people of the world, will have peculiar charms for them. Lord Ufford had not been ten days at Linton before he gave orders that "the pack" should be re-formed, and invited the neighbouring gentry to co-operate with him in creating that best possible feature of an agricultural district—a good hunt. Parties, it was understood throughout the county, would, as in the Earl of Linton-Stetchworth's time, manage the shooting over the Linton estates; and it was rumoured that in the spring of the next year it was Lord Ufford's intention to get up a steeple-chase, and had munificently undertaken to put down a purse of a hundred guineas as a prize for the winner.

It was pleasant to mark the commotion these pieces of intelligence created the country through. It was not the rich gentlemen alone who were delighted at the news, because the proposed schemes would increase the good-fellowship of their particular "set," but all men of all classes, from high to low, were thrilled with joy at the thought of re-entering on their glorious amusements. Keen-witted farmers, who had in the toil of many years amassed money, and grey hairs, and frames somewhat too unwieldy for the hazardous pastime of hunting, congratulated their sons on the news, and, rattling their money in their pockets, discussed the best way of turning out those excited lads on sufficient horses and in comely habiliments. Quite small dealers, or the humblest class of agriculturists, talked the matter over in the same spirit of approval, and proud and triumphant were the anticipations of the lucky owners of stout ponies, as they recounted the wonderful leaps they could take, and had taken, and would yet

take, on great occasions, mounted on their sturdy Shetlands. The very peasants were not free from the infection, the elders and their wives speculating on the probability of their seeing any of "the sport," and recalling the number of times the hounds, full cry, and all the gentlemen riding in scarlet after them, had come within half a mile of their cottages, and, in one or two glorious instances, right into their gardens, and slap across their cabbage-beds; and the younger ones vowing that if a cry of the dogs reached their ears, come what would, they would be off after "the pretty dears," and run till they hadn't a gasp of breath left in their bodies. And, in spite of what complacent writers tell us in the columns of Cockney newspapers, and in spite of all the edifying homilies that were whined over the grave of Mr. Assheton Smith, I am of opinion that a Catholic class-fusing sentiment of this kind has healthy results wherever it is called into action, and that English gentlemen will do quite as much good by stirring it up in the

hearts of the people as they will by poring over blue-books, and cutting down the navy estimates.

To make our country circle yet more agreeable, an old friend reappeared on the scene. Caroline Ufford returned from India with her husband. General Sir John Clayton had at length retired from service, and at seventy years of age had determined on passing the remainder of his days in England. His health was still unimpaired, and he was desirous of directing the energy of his still vigorous mind to the management of public affairs in the House of Commons, where his friends assured him that the presence of a man like himself was much required. Luckily, within six weeks of his landing on English ground, a vacancy occurred in the representation of Aldeburgh, and Lord Ufford, who was acquainted with his wishes, immediately invited him to offer himself to represent that not very important borough in Parliament. The invitation was accepted, and Sir John Clayton came forth-

with to Linton, accompanied by his wife and only child—a fine boy of eight years old.

It had been arranged between Lord Ufford and myself that I should remain quietly at Braden Manor, and not hasten to present myself to Lady Clayton. He would himself prepare her for seeing me, and would give her a truthful outline of my life since I had parted from her, confiding to her the sad story of my husband's disgrace, and the consequent good reasons I had for using an assumed name, and wishing to live in strict *incognito;* but he considerately advised me not to detail to her any unnecessary particulars of my many grievous experiences, and more especially to be silent on those events which immediately preceded my marriage. Acting on this plan, I kept quiet and at home, throughout the week of the Aldeburgh election, which, of course, terminated favourably for Lord Ufford's candidate; but on the day after I had read the announcement of General Sir John Clayton's return as a Member of Parliament, a messenger

from Linton brought me a note from Lord Ufford, announcing that he and Lady Clayton would drive over and see me in the course of the day.

They came punctually to the promised time. From my window I watched the open carriage which contained them whisk through the park-gates, and along the drive. Whenever it disappeared amongst the trees, I instantly ran my eyes to the point where I knew it would again come in sight. I marked every feature of her face while she was still far from me. In everything her gentle face was the same, except that it was, perhaps, at the same time more commanding and more serene. Twelve years under an eastern sun had not changed her, as I feared it would have done. Her soft skin and clear bright complexion had not in it one tinge of darkness; her forehead was as white as ever, and her silken hair was dressed in the old style, and she had the same small pink lips with which she kissed me when I was a poor outcast child. She alighted from the

carriage; she was in my hall—but I could not descend to receive her. I had intended acting more hospitably, but I could not fulfil my intention. Lord Ufford remained downstairs with Lady Ashby, who had welcomed the guests; but she—Caroline, my own dear mistress, the good, the pure of heart, the beautiful, the true one—guided by my maid, hurried upstairs to me, and threw her arms round my neck. She was still my sister, my only sister; she had no one but me to call by that name, and none save I had ever had for *her* a sister's love. Rawleigh had told her the whole story of my sorrows; so I need never pain myself with saying a word about them to her. I must return with them that very day to Linton, to see her own dear husband, and tell her if I did not esteem her a supremely happy woman. I must see, too, her boy. He was with her, but she had left him with Lord Ufford when she came in search of me. She and I should now not be separated again. Sir John Clayton had determined

to take Cleve Park, which was only four miles from Aldeburgh, and consequently we should be near neighbours and constant companions. She told me that she had always read all my books in India, though she little thought that the writer of them was her old friend, Miriam Copley—her pupil and sister; but she had been more than once startled by meeting in my pages with her own opinions (opinions which she had always been vain enough to think her own peculiar property), and expressed, too, just as she was in the habit of expressing them. But now the mystery of the coincidences was solved, and, with tears of fervour in her eyes, she commended me for the excellence of all I had written,—the noble poetry, the high tone, the generosity and benevolence, the enlarged charity, and, what was better still, the earnest Christianity which pervaded every page that had come from my pen. She was truly thankful, for mankind, that I had been raised up to do so much good, and for herself, that she was entitled to believe

that she had in some slight measure helped to inform and instruct me. Her glowing words made my cheeks burn with shame and pride, confusion and triumph. Generous creature that she was! How was I to convince her that I was unworthy this lavish eulogy? No words of mine could have made her understand that a writer's poetry may be widely different from his life,—that the nature of a tree is not always declared by the fruit which it yields! I was therefore silent, and allowed my blushes to add one more to the tale of my untruths.

We recalled all the incidents of years long past,—our readings, and walks, and conversations; my prophecies that I should live to be a lady, my quaint vagaries of speech and thought, and the energy with which I set to work to master the elements of learning. There was such a freshness of enthusiasm in the way my dear mistress treated these topics, that she infused into me an elation of spirits I had not known for years. It seemed that time and toil and the influences of a tropical climate had

worked in her an effect exactly contrary to that which they are usually known to produce. Instead of having lost vigour of mind, there was more girlish spring and elasticity in her naïve merriment and pathetic fancy than formerly. Mine had been a life of pleasure and vanity; hers had been one of duty and self-denial,—and her whole bearing seemed to me a testimony of how much the latter course is preferable to the former. We walked together through the galleries, and looked into the grim faces of the old pictures, as we had done fifteen years before; we peered out through an oriel window, and surveyed that very terrace on which she had paced in solitude, after escaping from the cruel argument into which she had been betrayed by Augusta Wingfield; we passed all my principal rooms in review, and when we came under the full-length portrait of that fair and false girl who had played a paltry part to the man who was the hero of her young life, she glanced shyly up at it, and then she looked timidly at me,

and, seeing in my face an assurance that she need not fear paining me by an allusion to the past, she put her loving arm round my neck, and kissed me in her old caressing fashion.

"You will not be jealous of me now?" she said.

"I never had good reason to be so."

"No; but there need not be reason in madness."

"Do you pardon me for my victory? You need not resent it. Some women would be too proud to be triumphant on such terms—through such an accident."

"All our endowments are accidents," she said softly. "'Tis true you have reason to thank Heaven—I mean the God who reigns in it—for having made you like that one; for possibly Rawleigh would not love you as he does were you not moulded in that style. But that circumstance alone would not have made him yours. You are the fair and goodly fruit, true and sound at the centre; and surely, since 'tis the treasure within that he prizes, you

would be a silly woman if you cared what subtle associations, so they are pleasant ones, he cherished with regard to the exterior."

"Thank you. But I don't want an apology for my beauty, Caroline. I am not ashamed to own how much I am indebted to it."

"No good woman is. I have known many women both beautiful and endowed with much intellect; but I have never known a really good one who took pride to herself in the latter, or who did not exult in the former. But, come, let us go and look for my boy."

We did so, and found him with Lord Ufford and Lady Ashby—a manly, royal-fronted child, with the Ufford profile and his mother's simplicity and goodness dwelling in his blue eyes.

It is not my purpose to give my readers a minute history of my life. They must be content with a large proportion of sketchy outline, and be satisfied if I fill up the parts of especial interest with some slight attention to detail.

General Clayton acted on his resolve to take Cleve Park, and he resided in it whenever his

parliamentary duties did not require his presence in London. The gallant veteran did not make that impression on the legislative body which he had hoped to effect. His rugged, military aspect and white beard were allowed to be a picturesque addition to the House of Commons, but his views on politics, even on questions connected with his own profession, were looked on as antiquated and fantastic. In short, the red-tapists refused to shape their opinions in accordance with the *dicta* of an old dragoon; and as the old dragoon, on his part, was not made of such plastic material that he could conform himself to theirs, he wisely abstained from attempting to take any active part in the business of the House; and as years passed on, and he approached nearer and nearer to octogenarian dignity, he passed more of his time in the country, taking his part in the sporting proceedings over which Lord Ufford had assumed a popular dictatorship.

If ever a genuinely happy, as well as good, woman lived on the face of this earth, it was

the comparatively young wife of this old soldier. There was a difference of at least thirty years in their ages; his locks and flowing beard were snowy white, and her light curls had scarcely bleached a single thread; but this seemed to raise no barrier between their sympathies. A more passionately fond wife than Lady Clayton never trod English ground. If any sentiment in her womanly nature was stronger than her wifely enthusiasm, it was that of maternal fondness for her pickle of a boy, who, under his father's guidance, and Lord Ufford's encouragement, soon began to manifest more ambition to ride his Shetland pony up with the hounds than to obey the scholastic admonitions of his tutor.

For more than four years I continued to lead a life of strict seclusion at Braden Manor. I had no friends save the inmates of my own house, Cleve Park, and Linton. I was within six miles of both of those places, and it was rare that a week elapsed without my paying the one or the other of those establishments a

visit. When Lord Ufford and Lady Clayton were in the country, the curious rustics, directly they saw my carriage leave the boundaries of my park, knew its destination,—for, if it turned to the right, it was bound for Linton; if to the left, it was sure to be set for Cleve Park. My friends occasionally went to London, for a brief taste of the season, or to a watering-place, for a breath of fresh air; but I never quitted my retirement, and it was very unusual for Lady Ashby to leave me even for a fortnight's change of scene. She, like me, had seen too much of the excitement and glare of fashion to find much enjoyment in it, and, like me, she had in her widowed life subjects of thought which inclined her to other solitude than that of crowds.

I doubt not the country had abundance of gossip about the mysterious inmates of Braden Manor. Beyond question there was plenty of surmising and rumour about Lady Ashby and Mrs. Maitland, their early histories, the cause of their intimate union, the reasons they had

for avoiding society, what hold they had on the friendship of Lord Ufford, and why they singled out Lady Clayton from all the other ladies of the neighbourhood for their familiar. Possibly the surrounding gentry did not think the better of our good taste for perseveringly keeping away from Linton and Cleve Park, whenever there was any danger of our encountering any of them at those places. I do not, however, think they had a suspicion of who the mysterious Mrs. Maitland was. None of them, as far as I could discover, ever associated that name with the better known one of Grosvenor Millicent; and as for Miriam Copley,—who had ever heard of that poacher's child? Why, even the magistrates had lost all tradition of the catastrophe on the other side of the country, in which the child's father had lost his life. The only people in the district, as I believe, who knew the antecedents of Mrs. Maitland, were, with the exception of Lord Ufford and my friends of Cleve Park, my own dear maid Rose, and old Mrs. Cookesley, of

the George Inn, at Aldeburgh. The latter personage I took into my confidence out of mingled motives of prudence and good-will. It was not oftener than once in six months that I drove into the streets of the little borough, but still there was just a chance that the good hostess of the George Inn, who had her wits about her, though she was nigh eighty, might see and remember me. Lord Ufford, therefore, as he knew he could rely on the good soul's fidelity, communicated to her my secret; and proud, indeed, the old lady was when Lady Clayton—once "her dear Miss Caroline of Laburnum Cottage"—took her over to Braden to have an interview with me, and equally glad was I to assure the kind-hearted landlady of the gratitude I cherished to her for having befriended me when my friends were few indeed.

If my life, at Braden Manor, was in some respects a sad one, its sadness was in no degree dependent on the external sameness of my days. Instead of needing the excitement of the varied society to which I had for years

been accustomed, I experienced relief and exhilaration from its absence. My mind was of that vigorous and enviable constitution that it could find unbounded enjoyment for itself in those pursuits which demand considerable abstraction from the common frivolities of the world, and at times, even complete solitude. A large proportion of my wakeful hours I devoted to study, and I read, under the guidance of Lord Ufford, with a method and perseverance such as had never before characterized my intellectual labours; and it is now with sincere thankfulness, tinctured by no element of arrogance, that I am able to say I have diligently, and with success equal to my labour, studied the works of philosophic writers who are rarely even glanced at by my sex. If I have an extreme horror for anything on the face of this earth, it is for a female *philosophe*—a pedant in petticoats. It is not, therefore, out of any sympathy with that most distressing of all human deformities, that I would here urge on those of my sisters who

are endowed with fair mental capacity, and are blessed with leisure and opportunity, to give up less of their time to achieving third-rate music and execrable water colours, and to devote two or three hours of each day to real, genuine, honest brainwork. They need not shrink from the study of mathematics, as something altogether beyond their mental range. If they would earnestly work at them for a twelvemonth, they would find their tempers improved, and if they arrived at no other valuable fact, they would learn what a very modest quantum of wit is enough to form a very respectable wrangler, and so would free themselves from an entire set of dangerous delusions. If they would only give my counsel a fair trial, they would find the sciences, which they now shrink from, whenever their long names are mentioned, quite as fertile sources of happiness as crotchet, tambour-work, potichomanie, oreven the ennobling employment of stitching linen raiment for the proselytes of an African missionary station;

and Society would, I am certain, be ere long relieved of its present insufferable abundance of strong-minded ladies.

But I was not only a reader, but that nobler part also of a student—a thinker. In deep thankfulness, and in no spirit of boastful pride, I say this. I no longer cared to write, and I was often ill at ease with myself for *having* written; for as I progressed in knowledge I became so sensible of the feebleness of some of my works, and the worthlessness of others, that I was ill at ease with myself when I remembered all the white octavo pages my folly had blackened. As I became more modest in my self-esteem, I became also more free from egotism, and my heart recalled old thoughts and aspirations from long-forgotten days, when, in my very earliest infancy, I heard voices in the firmament promising me a better existence than this poor earthly one. Nor was I content with merely meditating on goodness, but tried, in such humble acts as most of us have the means of performing, to give expres-

sion to my resolve that I would live not wholly for myself. I exult in knowing that the poor inhabitants of the village at my park-gate knew me, not as a formal benefactress, but as a social hearthside friend; that the toil-worn women in the peasants' huts loved me for what I *said* to them and *felt* for them, and not for what I *gave* them; that they taught their children to love me, and let them lisp out their prayers—kneeling by me, and putting their clasped hands in mine; and that the rudest and coarsest of their men gradually conceived a strong personal attachment to me, and were taught by me to cherish with tenderness their wives and simple children.

If any of my readers censure me for sounding my own good qualities in too high a strain, I beg them to remember that I have spoken with equal candour and hardihood of my bad ones. I call them to witness that in these pages I have not spared myself. Let them, then, pardon me for avowing boldly that, in one respect, at one period of my life I did

my duty; and if they must find out a depreciatory motive for this avowal, I am not unwilling to admit that I feel myself so devoid of stronger claims on the sympathy of my fellows, so poor in all that ought to attract human affection, that I cannot afford to be silent on this, my best title to the love of others.

Doubtless, there are those who feel curiosity as to other particulars of my moral condition at this period; and if I have hitherto forborne to state them, it is not because I falter at the task I long since proposed to myself, now that it is drawing nigh to its conclusion. I would not delude my friends into a belief that my life within corresponded in all respects with the serenity of its exterior. I make no false professions of having maintained, or of having, even for a short hour, arrived at that resignation and equanimity which I was desirous of attaining. On the contrary, I both recognised that which was cruel in my lot, and I cherished a hope, perhaps too fondly, that at some not very distant date I should be released from the

unjust bondage of widowed wifedom. I did not attempt to blink the fact that I was a needless victim to the cruelty of social laws. What crime had I done, that men should so punish me? I had not plotted or worked ill to any living creature; I had in no way broken the laws of my country; all that could be alleged against me was that my husband's crimes, unparticipated in and unsuspected by me, had covered me with shame and sorrow. Was this misfortune a just reason that I should be subjected to punishment, more severe than any other to which a sensitive woman can be subjected?—that I should be debarred from becoming the wife of the noble man who loved me, and with chivalric fidelity and devotion was biding the time when he should be able to claim me as his own by the laws of man, as well as by those of God? Had my husband died, I should have been free to marry Lord Ufford. And was not that degraded man, whom the law still persisted in calling *my husband*, in all respects dead to me? I had worn

for him the black dress of widowhood, and had plucked all tenderness for him from my heart; and we had been severed as completely as if the fatal scissors had cut the tie which once united us. Only a few years before, the penalty of his crimes would have been *death*. I fear that at times I almost regretted that his frauds had not been committed and discovered, and that we had not lived, earlier; for so, I should have escaped a condition hateful beyond description. That alteration in the law was surely a one-sided reform. It was well to show mercy to the culprit, but scarcely so to benefit him at the expense of his wife. Doubtless, it was right not to punish a human creature for dishonesty by hurrying him out of the world from a gallows; but what had the wives of such poor rogues done, that their fellow-countrymen were justified in thus addressing them:— "Whereas your husbands have committed crimes against society, and we in our supreme mercy have commuted their punishment from death to transportation for life, you, the innocent wives

of these bad men, shall lead a life of dishonoured widowhood so long as your husbands (dragged from you and condemned to perpetual slavery though they be) shall remain on the face of the earth?" Why was this increase of punishment inflicted on them? Their crime was the same as before,—that, namely, of being so unfortunate as to be the wives of disgraced men. Why, then, in the name of that Mercy which the Law-Refomers made so much loud talking about, was it commendable to add to the original penalty of unavoidable shame the punishment of compulsory widowhood, compared with which, the lot which made Jeptha's daughter a heroine was a career of enjoyment?

I tried to persuade myself that mine was a very exceptional case, and that the number of poor women who were fellow-sufferers with me was small. But I could not delude myself into this comforting view of my condition. I never read a newspaper that I was not reminded of the vast populations who, in prisons, penitentiaries, convict ships, and penal settle-

ments, were atoning for sins perpetrated against society. I remembered, too, another class of companions in tribulation, whose state, though arising from another cause—from mental instead of moral frailty—was identical with my own. Did not the crowded asylums, sprinkled broadcast over the length and breadth of the land, contain proofs that the pernicious condition of compulsory celibacy was not merely to be found in exceptional cases, but was inflicted by the selfishness of law-givers with terrible frequency, and a barbarous disregard of human pain? 'Tis passing sad to me, writing this in 1859, to reflect that the framers of the Divorce Act, which recently became the law of the land, though they exercised great ingenuity in favouring the wishes of vicious people, anxious to throw aside the wholesome restraints of matrimony, never gave one thought to the cruel position of these two large classes of sufferers, whose needless trouble and unmerited afflictions cry out so loudly for relief.

I have more than once in the course of this narrative had occasion to reflect mournfully on the slenderness of those barriers which, cutting my life off from felicity and moral excellence, kept it in the domain of contention, selfish passion, frivolous pursuit, and disappointment. I have often had occasion to speak of myself as the victim of unkind circumstances, and to make that saddest of all comments on the past, "Ah, how happy I might have been, if what was had not been!" In justice and in gratitude to that Power who shaped my destiny, I must own that, in dwelling on this critical period of my life, I am deeply impressed with the protecting care which shielded me from a temptation which my perverse imagination frequently pictured as presenting itself before me, and which possibly I might not have been strong enough to withstand. I shrink from putting into language the conclusion towards which I tend, whenever I ask myself what would have been the result if Lord Ufford had been one whit less generous of heart, less un-

selfish in his love. This is a peculiarly unpleasant topic of thought, and I passed it by without further discussing it. I would not, even in this vague and indefinite manner, have alluded to it, had I not felt myself compelled to do so by my vow of scrupulous fidelity and complete candour, whilst making these confessions.

Often, and often, in those long years of seclusion, this dangerous question shaped itself to me, in many forms and on every variety of occasion. It smiled on me alluringly, and terrified me with dimly-shadowed visions of shame, and sorrow, and remorse. It was a tempter, perseveringly haunting and assailing every weak point of my nature, with ridicule, jest, and irony,—with pathetic reference to things sublime, the tenderest associations of old memories, and the fairest dreams of hope. I had to do battle with it in the solitary hours of night, as my head turned to and fro restlessly on a lonely pillow; it grinned up at me from pages of history, and mocked

me into tears as I pored over those grand scenes in which Euripides lays bare the heart of woman—suffering in the old Greek life even as it suffers now; it was present to me when I sate in the humblest cottages of peasant-women, and saw them strain with strong affection their infants to their breasts, and heard them gossip with honest triumph of the husbands whom they loved; it made the gloom of autumn leaden black, and it saddened the clear blue heavens of June, as I roamed about my park, watching the deer herding under the distant timber, calling up old scenes of terror on the very ground where I had seen Rawleigh and his cousin meet to kill each other, pausing by the waterfall and the lock-bridge which Caroline Ufford sketched the day of my first introduction to Braden, gazing at the wild-fowl as they plashed and ducked about in the water, pacing slowly under the arching branches of the oak and walnut avenues, or regarding from a distant eminence the gabled roofs and bright terraces of my peaceful hall.

## CHAPTER VI.

### THE PEAR RIPENS.

It was a fresh clear morning, in the commencement of June, when, as I stood at the cheerful window of my breakfast-parlour, enjoying the pleasant sight of the terrace, which went by the name of "the cedar-garden," I was surprised by the sudden apparition of a carriage turning a corner of the park-drive, not more than four hundred yards from my station of observation. I had spent nearly five years in my seclusion at Braden Manor, and during all that time such an event as the arrival of a strange equipage had not disturbed the mono-

tony of my life. It was, therefore, with a sensation of astonishment that I drew back from the open window, where I had been enjoying the balmy morning breezes, and the scent of the flowers on the terrace, and debated who the visitor to my quiet home could be. I had just answered this inquiry by the agreeable suggestion that in all probability the occupant of the carriage was Lady Ashby's eldest son, who had, by a post received some days before, announced himself as on his way to England; and, with that readiness which people sometimes display in satisfying their curiosity and excitement with the creations of imagination, I had already proceeded to picture to myself a tender meeting between the mother and son, when my maid Rose entered the room, and, with an expression of something like consternation in her face, told me that Mr. Aubrey was in the house. She had seen him get out of his carriage, and follow the servant who opened the hall-door for him into the yellow drawing-room, where he

then was, waiting for the pleasure of an interview with me.

Strange! What could John Aubrey want with me? What plea could he urge to justify his intrusion on my privacy? I had not seen him for more than five years. Indeed, since the days of that terrible trial I had not beheld his face, or seen his hand-writing, or heard aught of him, beyond the slight information which the newspapers afforded me of his public proceedings, as a politician and a great capitalist. And, by some unaccountable good fortune, I had during all that period thought very little of him. I question whether his image had occurred to my mind a score times during the entire five years, save when it had been brought before me by paragraphs in the public journals. I knew that he was a frequent visitor at Linton, coming down in his capacity of Lord Ufford's agent to arrange and supervise the affairs of the estate, and taking part in the hunting and other sports which attracted the county aristocracy to the Lord Lieutenant's

hospitable residence. But, as I never by any chance appeared at Linton when visitors were there, and as John Aubrey was never invited to his patron's house, except at those periods when it was filled with company, we had never encountered each other there. All connection between us had been dissolved; and, as far as I was concerned, our separation had been one of forgetfulness and indifference, almost as much as of distance in respect of space.

What could the man, then, want with me now? I put this question to myself as I proceeded to the yellow drawing-room, and more than one painful fear flitted across my mind in reply, but not the faintest suspicion of the true cause occurred to me.

He was standing erect and looking out on "the cedar-garden," when I entered the drawing-room, and bowed to him coldly. He turned round, and with the self-possession and deferential bearing of a man accustomed to polite society, returned my proud greeting in an unabashed, but not defiant manner. I

seated myself on a lounge, and motioned to him to occupy a chair a few feet distant from me; and, as he obeyed my imperious signal, without in any way changing colour, or manifesting anger or uneasiness of any kind at my hostile demeanour, I appreciated, more highly than ever I had done, the strong will, and patient energy, and dogged resolution of his character. But time was beginning to tell on his personal appearance. When I had last seen him, his once glossy black hair was plentifully sprinkled with white; but now no one would have thought of objecting to his being described as "a grey-headed man." Indeed, he was five-and-fifty years of age; but, apart from the more than ordinary whiteness of his hair, he was, for that period of life, a young man, both in constitution and aspect. He had grown more wiry and sinewy; his limbs were still muscular, but his body was spare, and his face was to be remarked upon for its thinness. But in his keen searching eyes, and the firm, unyielding set of his countenance, an

observer saw faithful indications of his principal mental and moral characteristics—far-sighted cunning, caution, decision, and cruelty. There was strength expressed in every point of his person and peculiarity of his bearing — strength in his massive hand, strength in his knit brows, strength in his pallid cheeks—each furrowed with a long deep line from the eye to the corner of the mouth—strength in his broad shoulders and slender body, strength in his well-shaped arms and limbs (which, to one touching them, were hard as iron bars), strength in his firm, noiseless tread and the prudent promptness of his hands, which never moved unless it was *to do* something, and always dexterously executed that which they wanted to do,—strength in his never-wearying, ever-scrutinising eyes,—but nowhere tenderness, or any touch of generous feeling.

If years had robbed him of his early robustness of frame, they had contributed much in other respects to his personal appearance. He was altogether a more refined and polished man

than he was when we had parted five years before. He had laid aside his old disguise of beard and moustache, and his crop of hair, and his whiskers, formerly much too luxuriant to accord with ordinary usage, were now kept closely cut and accurately trimmed. He was still a sinister-looking man, but, all the same for that, one who bore the impress of conscious power and good breeding. And when I record this testimony in his favour, my words may be taken at their fullest meaning, for on standing once again in his presence I felt all my old instinctive abhorrence and loathing for the man come over me, and I never from that day saw him approach me without experiencing a sense of strong aversion and repugnance to him, and even now, whilst penning these lines, a sick faintness of horror oppresses me as I recur to his hateful memory.

"You are right in feeling that I am guilty of some indelicacy in intruding myself on you in this abrupt manner," he commenced our conversation by saying.

He paused for a few seconds after deliberately uttering the above words, and then he continued in the same matter-of-fact, rather than conciliating, manner:—

"You can but think that, whatever intelligence I have to impart, or whatever reason I may have for wishing to see you, it would have been more graceful in me had I either requested Lord Ufford to be my medium of communication with you, or given you notice by letter that I was desirous of having an interview with you. I am aware that I am connected in your mind with all the most painful experiences of your life, and that my presence, calling up as it does a multitude of harrowing recollections, must appear to you almost in the light of an insult."

"I wish, Mr. Aubrey, that I could with honesty assure you that you are mistaken in what you have just said. But, though I am surprised at receiving this visit from you, I I never imagined you would keep away out of

such a purely sentimental consideration as respect for my feelings."

"You wrong me, Mrs. Millicent, and I may say—since the *past* has already been alluded to by my mere appearance before you—that you might make a more generous use of your remembrances of it, than to use them as proof that it would be unreasonable to look for gentlemanly consideration from me. In the changes of circumstance and position that you have passed through, you have advanced to a higher degree of culture and generosity of thought. Can you not be charitable enough to believe that a like improvement has been wrought in myself?"

"In one respect at least you are unchanged," I answered, with a smile. "Mr. Aubrey is still a powerful advocate of Mr. Aubrey's excellencies. But why plead so touchingly to me? I cannot flatter myself that my good opinion can be of importance to you."

"Indeed, it is, though," he responded quickly, "for, unless I have it, my coming

here is an impertinence to you, and I am at the present moment causing you pain."

"You had better proceed, sir, to the business that has brought you here. When you have stated it, I shall be better able to judge what motives have induced you to take so much trouble in my service."

He displayed no irritation at my persevering insolence of demeanour, but fixed his eyes on the carpet for a minute, as if he were in his bank-parlour, and were debating what course he should pursue with a dubious applicant for money; and then looking up composedly into my face, he proceeded at once to the point.

"I am on the way, Mrs. Millicent, to Linton, with intelligence of great interest and importance to Lord Ufford. Immediately I received it myself, I posted down from London with all the speed that relays of four horses and good roads enabled me to make. My shortest road to Linton lay past your lodge-gate, and as it came within view it struck me

that, as my news very nearly concerns you, you would feel obliged to me for putting you forthwith in possession of it. It occurred to me that possibly it would be more agreeable to you that Lord Ufford should *not* be the first to convey the intelligence to you."

He spoke now in a very soft and ingratiating manner, but as he paused again he smiled a cold, cruel smile of amusement, as he saw the colour forsake my cheeks, and marked the changed feelings and intense excitement with which I now listened to him.

"Yes,—go on. I beg you."

"Oh, of course I will proceed, Mrs. Millicent —*since you ask me.* The intelligence which I have to communicate relates to the unfortunate man who *was* your husband."

"*Was—was*—what mean you?"

"He *is* no more. Mrs. Millicent, in the eye of the law, as well as in the regard of those who have known and commiserated your dreary life of endurance, you are released

from the bondage of your ill-starred marriage. Your husband has already been dead six months."

"How do you know this?"

He smiled again a smile that delicately, but still most forcibly, expressed how he enjoyed the triumph of having reduced me from my haughty temper to be an anxious supplicant that he would speak more fully; and then, having so far considered his own enjoyment, he proceeded to gratify my curiosity in every particular. He told me that rather more than a year and a-half from the time at which he then spoke, the convict, Charles Millicent, who had from his first arrival in Australia behaved with singular docility, and had won the favourable opinion of the officers who were charged with his custody, had obtained permission to enter the service of a wealthy sheep-owner in the interior of the country, at a considerable distance from any Government station. Having obtained this comparative freedom and restoration to respectability, Millicent remained

with his employer for three months, giving every evidence of an earnest resolve to become an honest and valuable servant; but at the termination of that period he had disappeared from the holding to which he had been consigned, and had so effectually baffled all pursuit that nothing was heard of him or his proceedings till nine months afterwards, when he, in the company of a gang of desperate ruffians, made an attack, by night, on the house of a wealthy merchant lying in the outskirts of Sydney. Fortunately the owner of the house had received intimation of the danger that hovered over him, and had made unusual preparations to repel the marauders. A fray took place, in which, after many shots had been fired, the robbers fled from the ground, leaving two of their associates dead on the field of contest. One of these poor wretches was the absconded convict—Charles Millicent. He had been identified by the Government authorities. Just at the time that the occurrence had taken place and was making a stir in

Sydney, a confidential agent in Mr. Aubrey's employment happened to be in that town negotiating the purchase of some vast tracts of land, and this person, being well acquainted with the convict Millicent's history and his connection with Mr. Aubrey, and presuming, as a matter of consequence, that full and accurate information concerning the affair would interest his master, had, before sailing to England, obtained an attested account of all the proceedings that took place before the local magistrates, and in addition to them a certificate of the death of Millicent from the Government authorities. It was to communicate this intelligence to Lord Ufford, and to place in his Lordship's hands the documentary evidence of the reality of the report, that Mr. Aubrey had posted from town, and was on his way to Linton.

When he had completed his story, John Aubrey rose from his seat, saying that it was incumbent on him to waste no more time, and expressing briefly a hope that he had

justified himself in my eyes for forcing himself upon me.

"I thank you for your goodness, Mr. Aubrey, in having stopped on your way to make this startling announcement. I believe that no motives, but those of kindness and delicate consideration for me, induced you to do so; and I trust that the recollection of this morning's interview will serve me as a useful lesson of charity, and prevent me from ever, in after life, judging you too severely."

As I said this I gave him my right hand, which he took, and, as he quitted the room he shook it cordially, and with expressions of hearty satisfaction both on his countenance and on his lips, at my according to him such a demonstration of my good will. But though he eagerly grasped my proffered hand, he did not presume to kiss it—as I, with a blush of shame, remembered him to have done years before.

As soon as my visitor had departed, I passed

out of the house through one of the French windows of the drawing-room, and, unobserved, paced up and down the retired side of the garden, under the dark boughs of the ragged cedars and the blackness of the giant yews, amidst the bright flower-beds that sparkled against the green of the smooth turf, and made the warm air heavy with odour, past the fawns and leaping satyrs, past the coy Venuses, past the trickling fountains, whose wreaths of silver were broken into spray by the lively breezes, and converted into beads of spangles by the calm sun that ruled in the cloudless blue of the unchanging heavens. I heard the birds sing blithely in the trees near me, and I heard the poor feathered things chitter and cry to each other on the islands in the park-water; and, standing at the extreme end of my terrace, I listened to the music one of my gardeners made, as he sharpened a scythe —and the music, more pleasant still, of his merry children, who prattled and laughed to him from an adjacent hillock.

My thoughts followed the carriage, which was being whirled along by four panting horses to Linton. What would *he* think?—what would *he* say?—what would *he* do? And then I turned sharply away from visions that made my heart bound madly and exult, and in the bold careering of a passionate mind I crossed the wide, stormy, never-resting waste of waters—that my eyes had first found a joyful awe in, when *he* stood pityingly by the poor beggar-child,—yes, over the surging deep, to a far distant land, associated to me only with shame and degradation and woe, under whose cheap dust lay the shattered body of the man who had loved and wronged me,—and whom I had loved, and learned to hate.

I could remain no longer in the open air,—in the cheery light of the bright day,—where all nature made a profound and sacred music. I retraced my steps, past the merry fountains, and silent statues, and darkling trees, and gaudy flowers, and sought the silence of my chamber;—and there, if tears and humble

prayers and the agonies of strong supplication gain for poor mortal souls the notice of their Eternal Parent, I was not unobserved by Him who "made and loveth all."

## CHAPTER VII.

### THE LADY OF LINTON.

"THERE is joy for those who wait," observed Lord Ufford to me, as we watched the sun falling down behind the western horizon on the evening of our wedding-day. We were standing together on the white cliff of Dover, with the tranquil ocean lying in ruby-tinted calm at our feet, and years of happiness extended before us.

There are some who, perchance, feel little interest in me, and who reject this story of my life as incredible, because its incidents are of a kind that precludes them from falling to the lot of ordinary mortals. The King Cophetuas

of this world are so rare that it is not reasonable to ask this unselfish generation of beggar-maids to sympathize with the good fortune of her who drew the prize from the lottery in which there are so many blanks. To those ladies who proclaim as "impossible" and "unnatural" every adventure in a narrative, which they have not individually experienced or have no prospect of being one day able to jot down in the chronicles of their own vicissitudes, it must seem "absurdly fantastic" and "utterly incredible," that the daughter of an ill-starred peasant should pass through shame, and suffering, and eventually, without loss of honour, rise to be a peeress, and in the very step that achieved her such an enviable distinction should become the wife of that man whom, throughout her chequered course, from her sorrowful childhood to her matronly maturity, she had loved with all the strong enduring passion of a poetic nature. I am aware that such a position is what is ordinarily termed "romantic," and if I were composing

a romance, or any other imaginative work, I would not admit it into my pages,—for what merest dabbler in the art of fiction has not been taught, by the stern criticism of these unegotistical times, that a novel ought to contain no incident which is not familiar to the personal experience of every reader who lives in a decent house and pays the Queen's taxes? But, as I am not drawing upon my invention, but profess only to tell the truth, surely I may speak it, though in some respects it be scarcely less startling than the story of Nelson's love, or Eugénie's exaltation, and through it direct passing attention to the fact that brilliant destinies are still, even in this prosaic age, accomplished by the children of obscurity,—as the records of royal houses can attest, and as the incredulous may learn in the pages of De Brett, whose volumes, rightly read, may possibly be a more amusing and beneficial study than Cockney satirists are, for the most part, inclined to allow.

I am proud to reflect on the humility that

leavened my love for Lord Ufford, to know that as child and woman I ever looked upon him as a being placed so high above me that it would have been contemptible presumption in me to pass any judgment (save that of unquestioning admiration) on his acts, or to debate the justice of his opinions. He was my *Law;* and it gladdens me to remember that my submission to him was so complete that, as long as his strong will remained upon the earth to influence me, I was totally unconscious how entirely my being was absorbed into his, —how, in every word of life, and beat of heart, and eddy of mind, I was nothing but his creature. I exult in being able to say that never, in one weak moment of vanity, did it occur to me to regard his heart as a precious prize that I had captured by my wit, and beauty, and womanly fascinations—but as a rich, rare gift which he had conferred upon me solely because it was his royal will to give it. I recall the surprise with which I often pondered on his goodness, and marvelled what

had induced him to neglect all the lovely women, born of noble houses, and from the cradle nurtured to adorn dignity, who would have gloried had he deigned to seek pastime in their beauties, and made him single out, from all my sex, me,—the offspring of poverty, the woman who had tasted the bitterness of scorn and insult, whose fame had been blackened with opprobrium,—to be the sharer of his commanding fortunes, and the sole possessor of his love. There never crept into my heart—though, alas! Heaven knows how easily Satan's whispers found an entrance there—a spirit ready to repine that the exquisite joy of self-sacrifice had been all of it his, and none of it mine. My wayward fancy never suggested to me that I too should have revelled in performing a like act of lavish generosity—in conferring wealth, honour, and love on one who could give me love only in return; and, so far from ever experiencing a satiety of that triumph with which I regarded the benefits showered by my lord upon me, or feeling, in

ever so vague and indefinite a manner, a burdensome sense of immeasurable obligation in having received so much, and given so little, I would gladly have learnt at any period of our wedded life that Lord Ufford had been thrice richer in worldly honour and royalty of nature, and I yet more dependent on his bounty for support, and on his beneficence for admiration.

On marrying me, Lord Ufford did not fear the inquisitive and censorious world. By nature and by social advantages he was above dreading the ridicule, or shrinking from the amusement and wonder, of those who watched his actions from a distance. Had he been a man of less mental force and self-dependence, pride of race and the dignity infused into him by culture would have defended him from the weakness of giving heed to vulgar curiosity; but he was by mental constitution, as well as by the consequences of position and nurture, especially formed to shape his own path in life —not in defiance of general opinion, but in unobservance of it. If he had been a peasant

by birth and loved one placed above him, it would never have occurred to him to regard his unkind circumstances as a reason for the relinquishment of his hopes ; and, in like manner, he was unable to see in his ancient lineage and wealth arguments why he should resist the promptings of his nature. He, therefore, married me, and told the world that his wife was the daughter of an unknown man named Roger Copley, and that she was the widow of Charles Grosvenor Millicent—a man not likely to be altogether forgotten in the London where he had rendered himself conspicuous by intellect and infamous by crime. Lord Ufford disdained to lead to the altar a bride shrouded in the miserable cloak of an assumed name ; and I was well pleased to stand forth my proper self, in all my shame and all my honour, and to be assured that no lie or paltry subterfuge of mine soiled the splendid whiteness of our marriage robes.

And the world paid me homage. Doubtless the unkind followed the dictates of their

hearts, and the mean whispered their vile detractions on every side, hoping to find others courageous and bad enough to repeat them in a loud voice, and the feeble slaves of wills stronger than their own listened anxiously for the keynote, ere they played their parts; but I cannot, without tears of gratitude, recall the expressions of sympathy that poured in upon me from old friends, and the frank, cordial welcome given me by the highly-tempered ladies and the gentlemen, who constituted my husband's more immediate circle of acquaintance, when I reappeared in society with such an enviable accession of wealth and rank. Nowhere was I subjected to the hauteur and cold arrogance that sometimes—but not often—women of high rank and fine natures are so forgetful of their own dignity as to display to their social inferiors. In London I became at once a personage of the first importance. Stetchworth House once again became famous as a common ground on which leading politicians, diplomatists of every country in Europe, statesmen, wits,

writers, *savans*, and the leaders of fashion, of all parties and sections, of all cliques and factions, were in the habit of meeting to enjoy each other's good qualities—separated as much as possible from the rivalries and contentions of counter-ambition and antagonistic opinion. By the highest family of the kingdom I was honoured with the flattery of delicate kindness, and during the brief period that Lord Ufford's party held office I was advanced to a post of dignity in the Royal household which had never before been held by a lady of humble extraction, whatever might be her acquired rank.

After all that we had passed through, life was still young for *me*, and not yet in the yellow sere for *my husband*. At the time of our marriage, I, by the computation which in ignorance of my exact age I have used to date the events of my life, was five-and-thirty, and he was only fifty years of age. In appearance I was much younger; no one would have imagined me more than seven or eight and

twenty. My figure had arrived at the perfect development of its womanly charms, but it retained all its girlish lightness, and grace, and lithe mobility; and my face was miraculous in its loveliness. I delighted to sit before a mirror and watch myself. It was not the tickling of gratified vanity, the sweet intoxication of self-love, that constituted my enjoyment in so doing; for, without one touch of falsehood or self-delusion, I can assure my readers that whilst I observed my semblance in a glass—which I often did for minutes, ay, and even an hour together, at morning, when the crisp fresh air, blowing through the open casement, waved the masses of my unbound odorous locks over the white marble of my shoulders, and made my pink lips work, and the bloom of health mantle in my round, tender cheeks, under the fanning of its delicious purity,—or when the soft lamps were burning in my curtained room, and the exciting influences of the midnight hour called a more vivid, subtle, terrible brightness into my complexion,

and a more than usual brilliancy into my earnest eyes, and gave a startling significance to every element of my radiant beauty; at such times, I can assure my readers, I never thought egotistically of the image before me being the vision of my own charming self, but I gazed at it for *its* own sweet sake—not mine, with a mysterious delight, and something of the deep poetic fervour of that fair boy whose grief and madness are embalmed in classic story.

It may not be thought that Lord Ufford and myself were content to be the trifling loungers of fashionable throngs. We were never in London more than three months in any year; and, though we several times went for brief trips to Paris and Vienna, we passed by far the greater part of our days at Linton. My kind friend, Lady Ashby, continued to reside at Braden Manor, retaining, out of respect to the wishes of myself and my husband, the establishment exactly on its old footing, and permitting no alteration to be

made in the plan of the garden, the aspect of the flower-beds and terraces, the pictures in the dark-walled corridors, or in any of the appointments of the house. She and Lady Clayton were still my most intimate friends, never ten days passing, whilst we were in the country, that we did not see each other; but I no longer avoided my other neighbours. On the contrary, I did my best to give a healthy tone of cordial, Catholic friendliness to the society of the county over which I had been raised to preside. I heartily co-operated in all Lord Ufford's attempts to make the liberal hospitality which he exercised at Linton the means of driving from among us those petty rivalries, and feuds, and distinctions, which too often work their mischievous way into the ranks of the provincial gentry, and sow bitterness and dissension amongst a whole district of agreeable families, who might otherwise be contributing materially to their common enjoyment of life. Under Lord Ufford's encourage-

ment the county became more than ever passionately fond of field-sports. In every direction there were squires with modest half-packs of harriers; and "the hunt," with its two picked packs of fox-hounds, its huntsman that a royal duke had shabbily, but ineffectually, tried to lure away from us, and its staff of "whips," had become one of the most famous in the kingdom. Of this "hunt" the Lord-Lieutenant of the county was "master," and a more enthusiastic, popular, and admired "master," no hunt ever had. He was a perfect horseman, intrepid, cool, quick-sighted, never disturbed by any conjuncture of difficulties, and consummate in style. The field never went well without him. His clear voice, firm seat, judicious calculation, fearless leaps and resolute bearing gave to "a day out" a spirit and completeness that never appeared when he was absent. Half my meaning is left unexpressed, when I say that I thoroughly sympathized with him in the ardour which he threw into this grandest of amuse-

ments. Whenever the meet was at all within a manageable distance from Linton I always appeared at the cover-side, mounted. I was not strong enough to bear the exertion and perilous excitement of the run; my doctors peremptorily forbade me ever to follow the dogs more than a mile and a-half, and never cordially approved of my obstinacy in taking so much horse exercise as was involved in riding six or eight miles to cover, and a gallop over two or three enclosures with the same number of leaps before turning round, for home; but to all attempts to restrain me from this moderate participation in my husband's darling pastime I replied with stubborn opposition. I did so thoroughly revel in the animation and triumph of the scene!—in watching the gentlemen of the county, and the honest, intelligent yeomanry, assemble with loyal attachment around my lord, as he negligently descended from a cropped hack, and, having thrown from his shoulders into a groom's hands his light grey overcoat, mounted the high-bred, bony, deep-

flanked hunter that manifested its impatience at waiting for "the master" by champing a flaked bit, and striking the wet turf with a murderous hoof;—in keeping my eyes fixed on *him*, as the southerly wind lazily bore back the flaps of his scarlet coat, and with a smile of goodwill at the cloudy sky he raised his white hand, and silently gave the signal to John Smelt, the huntsman, to proceed to business; in responding to the hurried greetings of my numerous friends who often gave me plain, bluff, outspoken congratulations on the condition of Lord Ufford's horse, or his own more than ordinarily splendid presence;—in answering to the smile of farewell that ever lighted *his* superb brow and firm mouth, as he tightened his cap down over his crisp, ebon curls, and rode up at slow, long-stepping trot to the cover;—in the waiting—the anxious straining of the ear for every sound—then the first great cry — followed by the deep, tumultuous chorus.

But at present I have only indicated the

source of the lesser joys of my married life. I now approach a different side of existence—the highest and most sacred one. In the second year after becoming Lady Ufford I gave birth to a daughter—the only offspring I was destined to have. She was christened Caroline, in token of my fervent affection and gratitude to Lady Clayton, who was invited, and gladly consented, to be the wonderful babe's godmother. In our joy at the arrival of this dear child, neither I nor my husband manifested or felt any disappointment that it was not a son. I was too proudly and madly elated by being a mother to think of aught beyond the immediate delights of kissing and fondling a fair living thing that was of and from me—flesh of my flesh, and bone of my bone. Oh, merciful heavens! how incomparably mean, when placed beside this ecstatic consciousness of being a mother, were all the joys of the previous year, rich though it had been in bliss, and all the joys I had ever fashioned and longed for in imagination! And

as for my husband, he was more childishly, ridiculously beside himself with exultation than I was. She was a round, wee, smiling thing, with enormous blue eyes, with a network of blue veins threading the half-transparent waxwork of her pretty limbs. As she grew up, she resembled the girls of her sire's house more than me;—year by year, in the ethereal delicacy of her profile, in the placid thoughtfulness of her countenance at moments of repose, and the naïve merriment of it in periods of vivacity, in her blue eyes and clear complexion and blonde tresses, manifesting a stronger similitude to the ingenuous, generous-hearted Caroline Ufford of Laburnum Cottage. And at this present date the young lady has fulfilled the promise of her fascinating infancy, and is allowed by artists familiar with the portraits of the women of her race to be "surpassingly beautiful—even amongst Uffords," but in height and airiness of form she is the reproduction of Miriam Copley.

It would be impossible for me to convey to my

readers an idea of the new world of unsuspected powers, and sympathies, and associations, which the constant presence of my child introduced me to. Till she came to me to fold her weak fingers round my hands, to gaze up into my face with wondering speculation, to crow, and babble and laugh her inarticulate — all but dumb — poetry to me, to seek from me, as she grew older, the names of common things of household use, and the natural marvels that first charm an infant's mind, to listen demurely with crossed hands and mute surprised eyes as I tried in the simplest words to imprint on her pure mind the ideas of "goodness," "mercy," and "love," to weep her transient tears like April sun-shine, and to smile with heaven's own radiance, — till then I never recognised the awful responsibility of every living creature for the effect that he produces on all the generations of men that succeed him on the face of the earth. In every little thing I said or trifling thing I acted to my child, I saw a grain of mustard-seed that might in the

grand revolutions of ages grow into a vast tree—whose fruit should be good or be evil after the nature of the original germ. I thought of my own sad childhood, in which the divine loveliness of a noble human soul had been soiled, and scarred, and irremediably injured; in which love had been changed into hate, veneration into defiance, trustfulness into dissimulation, hope into abject dread. Had I not as a young girl, when my sensitive and religious nature awoke to a recognition of the holy things of life and the terrible contrasts of moral existence, passed frequent hours in passionate weeping and violent despair, ere I could with resignation accept the cruel result of my previous experiences—the fact that I could never recover the virtue that human sin had taken from me, or purge myself of the poison which the same accursed agency had instilled into me? Oh, my child should never taste of such anguish, should never know the bitterness of that cup which must be drained to the dregs ere a descendant

of frail Eve is reduced to exclaim over the memories of a polluted childhood:—"Whatever I think, or do, or pray, and however I may strive to regain the lost position, I can never be that which I might have been!"

And that I might fulfil this strong, and (as I do believe, in spite of all my sarcasms and heartless levity) this *universal* purpose of maternal love, I strove with all my heart, and soul, and strength to *be* that which I hoped and prayed my child might be.

Possibly, as years passed on and brought us no other child, Lord Ufford thought with regret on the sex of our only offspring. He never displayed the faintest shadow of such a sentiment; his was a nature that rendered it impossible for him by a careless word, or glance, or sigh, to betray a feeling, calculated to cause me pain, which any exercise of fortitude and consideration on his part could have spared me; but, when I regard his position as a peer of ancient lineage, great wealth, and

honourable repute, and give due weight to that sacred sentiment which universally makes men wish that their rank, and honours, and power should be worn, when they are in their graves, by manly offspring of their own loins begotten, I cannot doubt that my husband often had to conceal from me by a strong effort of will his sorrow that he had no heir. But, however much of this cold shade of discontent dwelt in his heart, it never lessened the ardour of his affection for me and his child. From the time when she was an inhabitant of a cradle to that in which she had her first lessons in riding from papa, and to that later date when, brilliant and sparkling as a child-nymph fresh from the purest depths of the sea, she opened a ball at Linton, given in honour of her tenth birthday—she was her father's constant playmate and familiar. What music, as they romped in hall or garden, was their laughter to me!—his clear, manly, boisterous shouts, and her light silver-ringing ripples of gladness! And that he might have

ties of affection with the future lords of Linton, he sought the next heir to the barony and the entailed estate, and begged him to live in cordial amity with him. I liked this possible Lord Ufford much at first sight, and now I cherish for him a tenderness such as I am able to feel for few of the children of men who live on this present world. He was a fine-hearted and highly-bred young man (scarce twenty when I first made his acquaintance), well educated, and with a soldierly bearing that doubtless was fully appreciated by the officers of the Hussar regiment in which he held a commission. He had branched off from the main-line of the Uffords some two hundred years before his particular personality had given any trouble to human kind, and he was the only son of an old Admiral Ufford, who was also an only son. (My husband used sometimes to say with a shiver, "I don't like this habit our family have got into of having *only* sons; '*only* sons' is but a step from 'no sons.'")

Admiral Ufford was, when his son first

visited us, still alive, but his age was so great that it never occurred either to me or Lord Ufford to regard *him* as the heir-presumptive of the family head-ship. He was a queer old man—proud, poor, hipped, fantastic. If it pleased me to do so, I could write a pleasant volume on no other subject but his whims and oddities. He was the only one of my husband's house who expressed any anger at the lineal representative of Hanneth and Hugo marrying "beneath his rank;" but he boiled out in the most grotesquely furious manner on the occasion, and, for a long time, not only declined to have any intercourse with us, but peremptorily forbade his son to enter the doors of any house of which "*that* Lady Ufford" was mistress. But, after a while, he moderated his tone, and when time persisted in reassuring him that I should not after all work "his boy" such irreparable injury as he at first was convinced I should, he condescended to form with me a personal acquaintance—which resulted in his being one of my most enthusiastic

admirers, and in my tempering my amusement at his absurdities with a very considerable share of genuine good-will.

I am willing to admit here, if I must confess the whole truth as well as nothing but the truth, that, in moments of romantic weakness, I and my husband more than once gave away our daughter in marriage before she had advanced to the dignity of having "her own knife and fork," and that we built innumerable castles in the air with regard to her future, which tumbled to pieces and totally vanished, and in so doing set an example which many of our follies, when we have had enough of them, are not so good-natured as to profit by. When the Honourable Caroline Ufford was in long clothes I bestowed her in wedlock on Frank Clayton—a magnificent rip, at the top of his form at Eton; with the progress of time, however, that scheme, although my approval of the above-named young gentleman experienced no check, was laid aside in favour of a plan

which gradually and seriously took form in Lord Ufford's mind, and eventually became the wish nearest to his heart. His not unreasonable hope was that one day our child might be united to her cousin Reginald, the Admiral's son, so that the rank and wealth of his house might descend in the same line.

"But their ages are so different," I objected, when he first suggested this notable plan to me.

"The difference will be less every year. At present, Reginald is three times as old as Caroline; he is just nineteen, and she is only a few months more than six years of age; but when she shall be six years older she will be half his age, and she'll go on overtaking him till I doubt not that eventually she will be the older of the two."

With a laugh I answered:—

"But still she must always be more than twelve years his junior.

"And is it such a hardship," he cried, "for a woman to be twelve years younger

than her husband? Why, Miriam, surely you forget by how much more you are my junior."

And truly I had forgotten that fact altogether, and he was not ill-pleased with me when I pleaded guilty to the charge.

Does anyone ask how my moral nature fared under the benign influences of my married life? One hears so many foolish things said about the temptations of riches and the enervating effects of prosperity, that I doubt not there are those who would feign surprise at my assuring them, that the manifold blessings of my earthly lot worked the most desirable results in my character. If there is one cant that irritates me more than another, it is that very common one with which the fortunate of this world display their ingratitude to the Providence which has so mysteriously loaded them with plenty. Were we to place reliance on the dicta of this polite blasphemy, we should come to the conclusion that selfishness and cruel heedlessness, and all the

sins of pampered indolence, are excusable when the culprits are goaded by no immediate dread of want into a too eager consideration of their own desires, and have no terrible knowledge of pain and privation in their own persons to plead in extenuation of their indifference to sufferings not their own. I can assure these ingenious apologists for abused talents, that instead of finding wealth a snare to hold me fast in wicked pride, or a power that lured me to forgetfulness of the weak or to disregard of things divine, I found in it both the means and the impulse to benefit others and strive to be better myself. In my changeful career I have experienced the extremes of poverty and prosperity, contumely and praise, ignominy and honour, and am therefore to a certain extent entitled to speak authoritatively on the comparative moral advantages of a benignant lot and an adverse fortune, and on the strength of no common acquaintance with both conditions I can assure my friends that, if the temptations of Dives have made

them bad, the trials of Lazarus would have made them worse. Poverty is Satan's favourite livery. With instant hunger or the dread of it spurring him on, a man must be endowed with rare fortitude to be able to keep a keen edge to his conscience, and he must have a combination of powers not often found united —strength of will, strength of intellect, and adamantine strength of body,—if he would progress in mental culture and spiritual worth, if, as the current twang goes, he would "elevate himself." It is an exceptional case where a human creature can stand ten hours' hard work for bread and meat, and then have energy to pursue poetry and religion over the benches of a Mechanics' Institute. Even an educated mind, as a rule, needs leisure, and seclusion, and peace within itself, ere it can raise itself to the contemplation of lofty subjects. But where can the children of poverty find leisure, or seclusion, or *peace* within themselves, when the clamour of the foreman and the factory is only exchanged for the clamour

of the yard and the landlord? The poor have no time to be good. It may be that

> "Satan finds some mischief still
> For idle hands to do,"—

but it would be well to expend some heed on the devices of the devil in connection with the *busy ones*. Virtue is a hard task for the poor. But for the rich how easy it is of accomplishment! 'Tis a mere relaxation, an Epicurean amusement. What is self-denial to the prosperous but a game in which the stakes are the paltry vanities which even frivolous natures soon weary of, and the winnings are delicious draughts of spiritual arrogance? In one sense indeed it is almost impossible for the rich to be virtuous, for with them virtue is achieved at so slight a cost of self-mortification that it scarcely can be called virtue.

I therefore take little credit to myself, when I admit that the favourable nature of my circumstances produced in me results agreeable to others as well as calculated to win for me a

reputation for an unusual amount of good qualities. I made those around me happy, for I was happy myself. I relieved the distress of the poor on my husband's estates liberally enough to be all but worshipped for my benevolence,—and with discrimination, because it was against the grain of my nature to perform anything I put my hand to in a blundering fashion. But more than this;—looking into the inmost recesses of my heart, and speaking with a solemn sense of the great sin I should be guilty of if I were here to make any hypocritical professions, I can say that I became a charitable and devout woman—weak and erring as the frailty of my nature necessitated me to be, but gentle and lovable in all my relations to mankind, and with humility and fervour pondering much on the sacred mysteries of life.

But the gladness of my life was destined to close with more than that sadness which must always attend the departure of earthly happiness. We had eleven full years of unspeakable

felicity, but with the twelfth came gloom and despair, and ere it ended I was again left to pursue my way desolate and weary.

For some time prior to the opening of that twelfth year, John Aubrey and Lord Ufford had held more frequent intercourse with each other; I did not care to inquire into the particulars of their mutual relations, and it appeared to me as scarce worthy of notice that my husband should cultivate intimate relations with his business adviser, whom it had been his humour to raise from obscurity to distinction. John Aubrey had had the good taste to visit Linton less frequently since my marriage than before it; he knew that his presence was painful to me, and he forbore from inflicting it upon me, and I entertained a feeling of satisfaction at his conduct in this respect, that at times almost resembled the first faint beginnings of gratitude. I did my utmost to think well of him, and if I failed in the endeavour, it was not in consequence of wanting a charitable desire to regard him in a favourable light.

He had won for himself a reputation for benevolence, by presenting large sums to public charities, and giving his weighty support to the numerous humanitarian projects which have lately become so popular in London; and I strove to believe that he deserved the praise which was on all sides bestowed on his philanthropy. But I never succeeded in overcoming my strong repugnance to him; and when I observed that his presence and companionship seemed to have a depressing influence on Lord Ufford I speedily became alarmed. I began to remark that my husband never came from a long closet interview with his banker (for that was Aubrey's ostensible relation to him) without an expression of chagrin, anxiety, even of profound dejection on his countenance. Taking care not to unduly strain my right to his confidence, or in the selfishness of solicitude to step in rudely on his troubled moments, I inquired the reason that the visits of his business adviser seemed to be less agreeable to him than formerly, and he in

reply assured me that there was nothing for me to trouble myself about in the matter,—that he was disturbed for poor Aubrey's sake, who had met with great business misfortunes, and would, he feared, lose a large part of his wealth. I should have been satisfied with this answer, if Lord Ufford's countenance and manner had during the next few weeks supported it; but instead of doing so, they added to my uneasiness and increased the number of my fears.

His fits of dejection rapidly changed into settled, unvarying despondency. He left me abruptly at Linton, and went up to London for three weeks; and when he returned, such a cruel change had come over his aspect that my heart was smitten with a presentiment of imminent disaster, and my white lips scarce had the power to greet him. He had during his brief absence become pale and worn, and the number of his grey hairs had so increased that he almost looked an aged man; his cheeks had sunk in between his jaws, and his brows were permanently knit as though he were making a

perpetual effort to conceal sharp bodily pain. I threw my arms round him, and implored him to tell me what had so affected him; but he only strained me closer to his heart, and in a broken voice begged me not to ask. He could not conceal from me that he was an undone, ruined man, but he besought me by the love I bore him to endure the spectacle of his anguish (it would not last long, he said) without seeking its cause.—There is comfort to me in reflecting that I had the courage and the strength to obey him; that I was his one friend, his constant companion, in those last gloomy days; and that on no occasion did the curiosity or the egotism of affection betray me into any word or look calculated to add to the intensity of his woe.

He called our child and told her that he was ill, that her innocent prattle was the only medicine he could take. They walked much together in the park, she with her little hand in his, and he with his pale, furrowed face and searching eyes turned down to her. For hours

together he sat in dumb grief in a corner of the library, with his darling on his knee, and stroking her golden locks, when it would burst upon him that she scarce took from his overburdened spirit one grain of its heaviness, whilst he, by perpetually resting his sad gaze on her, was infusing into her young days sorrow that ought not to be anticipated. And then he would abruptly leave her, and go away where there was none but his wife to watch his tears.

He talked of change of scene; of quitting Linton, and even England for a time; of going to sunny Italy. But these projects were not acted on; for ere two months had passed he had gone upon a longer journey, far, far away; and his broken heart was comforted.

## CHAPTER VIII.

### ANOTHER TRIAL.

THE old Admiral was still alive when my lord died. The title and the entailed estate therefore descended to the veteran of eighty-five years, whom, with a foolish disregard of the uncertainty of human life, I had never looked on as having a chance of bearing my husband's honours. The late Lord Ufford left a will, made during his last visit to London, about three months before his death. It was a brief, concise, and perspicuous document; and it astonished no one more than it did myself. Of the property at his own disposal, and which,

in land and securities, was not less than three hundred and fifty thousand pounds (after bequeathing out of it legacies of twenty thousand pounds to his kinsman next in succession to the barony, and to that kinsman's only son, Reginald; a legacy of ten thousand pounds to his faithful friend, John Aubrey, and a like sum in numerous smaller donations to servants and dependants), he gave the whole to me and my heirs unconditionally. Such was the testament of which "Miriam, commonly known as Lady Ufford, the cherished companion of the testator during the happiest years of his life, and the mother of the testator's darling child Caroline" was nominated sole executrix.

No lawyer had been employed to construct that simple but strictly formal and duly-attested instrument. The writing of it was by the testator's own true hand, and was eloquent in every line of his supreme love for and deep confidence in me. It surprised me for many reasons. The terms in which he alluded to me struck me as singular, both in their tenderness,

and also the ambiguity with which they alluded to the relationship that had subsisted between us. I was astonished, but deeply gratified, by *my* child—and *his* loved and only one—being left altogether dependent on my maternal affection and womanly prudence. And I was perplexed to account for that state of mind which had induced Lord Ufford to leave me the *sole* executrix of his will, when Mr. Aubrey—as his banker and business adviser—to whom he had bequeathed a handsome legacy as a last proof of his regard—was the person who might reasonably expect the compliment of at least being united with me to perform the duties of such an important office.

I wondered at all the features of this remarkable will, perhaps even more than the world did, but accepted it (as I should have done, if it had implied a less flattering reliance on my integrity and moral strength), with an unquestioning confidence that it was dictated by a sound judgment and for wise ends. The meaning and spirit of it were clear to me. As I

perused the fair sheet on which it was penned with characteristic firmness and neatness, it seemed to me that I heard the voice of my husband speaking to me from the grave, thus:—"Miriam, guard our child. You have strong will, sound discretion, and imperishable devotion to my memory. By the possession of these qualities, as well as by the promptings of maternal love, you are beyond all others fitted to perceive and fulfil the intention of my will, the welfare namely of our child."

As soon as the death of Lord Ufford reached John Aubrey's ears, he hastened down to Linton to offer me his services at that terrible period. I felt grateful to him—yes, even to him; for *he* on whom I had relied so long was taken from me, and I had yet to learn again to rely on myself. Moreover, John Aubrey had always professed (and with sincerity—as I still believed) a loyal attachment to his patron and benefactor; and, if a subdued manner and a countenance of touching melancholy were ever the reliable expressions of a

bruised spirit, I was compelled to think that his were such. He did not obtrude his sympathy on me, or presume to be a sharer in that woe which was all mine; but, noiselessly and with unofficious care, he took off my hands every burden he could with propriety attempt to relieve me of. He spoke little to me during the frequent, but not long, interviews we had both before and immediately after my lord's funeral; but by a few brief, pathetic sentences —and yet more by the mute eloquence of bearing—he caused me to be deeply impressed with his own sense of the calamity that had befallen him.

He expressed no surprise at the tenor of his patron's will. Indeed, he even hinted to me that he himself had counselled my husband to make such a disposition of his estate. He gave me particular information with regard to the large property of which I had become possessed, and assured me that, much as his time was occupied, he would with pleasure devote every attention to the conduct of my

affairs, until I should feel strong enough to have a personal interview with my lord's solicitor.

Lord Ufford (not *my* lord. How cold and insulting to *his* memory it seemed to me, when I first called his kinsman Lord Ufford!) begged me to remain at Linton, which necessarily had strong holds on my affection, and continue, for years to come, to make it my residence. But I declined the offer of the kind-hearted old nobleman, and retired once more—this time widowed indeed — to Braden Manor, which Lady Ashby had vacated six months before. Not a stone, or stick, or stool of the old mansion had been altered. There it stood, just as it had stood a generation before, amidst the bright flowers and trickling fountains of its terraces, surrounded by its velvet lawns and sombre skirtings of yew and cedar, and bosomed in its rich undulating park. Every avenue was the same as when I had first admired the grand proportions of the oaks and walnut timber and limes that composed them.

It seemed that the very self-same deer moved with gregarious timidity over the mossy turf; and, as I wandered again up and down the dry, hard gravel-walk of "the cedar-garden," pondering on all the past, and nerving myself to do my duty in the desolate future, I would pause and listen—as I had often paused and listened in days gone by—to the plaintive, harsh cries of the poor feathered things upon the lake! Oh why, when all else remained the same, had he left me?

When the first dreary year of my widowhood elapsed (but not till then), I found myself able to take a more active interest in the control of my affairs. My husband's solicitors, whom I had since his death seen only five or six times, although they performed numerous professional services for me that it was impossible to delay, were at length summoned, and, at my request, they imparted to me full information with regard to my property. Amongst other legal documents which these very intelligent and honourable gentlemen

placed in my hands, was a complicated and elaborate will, made by the late Lord Ufford some two years previous to the execution of his last testament. I read this annulled will with lively attention, and was not surprised to find that it proposed to invest John Aubrey, in case of his patron's death during the minority of his child, with a responsibility and power over the testator's bequeathed property that were in no way conferred on him by the instrument that succeeded it. From this circumstance, and also from the fact that by this cancelled will the residue of the estate, after the payment of the large legacies, was left to me fettered by numerous restrictions and conditions, I was led to regard John Aubrey with suspicion and a very considerable increase of dislike.

The conviction daily grew upon me that between him and the late Lord Ufford there had subsisted a secret from all participation in which I had been excluded. There were no satisfactory materials at my command for

showing the reasonableness of this belief, still less for proving that it was a just one; but a multitude of little revelations, separately of no great weight, but collectively of much importance, joined to my instinctive antagonism to the man (an antagonism that all my efforts to think of him charitably had not been able to overcome) made me determine to have as little as possible to do with him for the future. I did not hasten to a sudden and violent rupture with him. I still kept, as my husband had done, an account at his bank that gave him the custody and use of a considerable sum of my money; but by a cold manner, a frigidly polite caution, I let him understand that I wished to hold myself aloof from him. By engaging the services of a very superior agent, I manifested to my banker that I should no longer stand in need of his *friendly advice* in business matters; and when he saw his suggestions ungraciously received and studiously neglected, he desisted from offering them to me. Soon our personal

intercourse was so slight that, by the end of the third year after my husband's death, I congratulated myself on having shaken off the most intimate and most distrusted of my old friends.

During these three years I remained a constant resident in the country,—never for a single night quitting Braden, unless it was when I passed a week at Cleve Park in the society of Lady Clayton. The education of my beloved child, the memories of joys gone from me for ever, the resumption of my old studious and contemplative habits, and the faithful discharge of the duties which devolved on me as one of the wealthiest residents in my county, supplied me with so much occupation, that I never desired to move far from my home, or to re-enter the local society over which I had for many years presided. But towards the middle of the fourth year of my widowhood, my little girl's health gave me so much anxiety that I conceived a strong desire that she should pass some weeks under the daily surveillance

of a metropolitan physician on whose learning and professional skill I had the greatest reliance; and in addition to this consideration, I wished to obtain for her some of those educational advantages which no expenditure of wealth can bring to a child permanently fixed in a province distant from the capital. I determined, therefore, to overcome my repugnance to absenting myself from Braden, and once more to make a sojourn of some duration in London. Stetchworth House (which as a portion of the entailed estate had descended with the peerage), was kindly placed at my disposal by Lord Ufford (then in his eighty-ninth year), and at the commencement of the following winter I was again located in my old quarters.

As soon as my arrival in town was effected, and even sooner, it was announced in the papers which devoted a portion of their space to fashionable intelligence; and forthwith many of my friends, whom I had not greeted for years, came to see me. But I was reso-

lute and successful in resisting all the innumerable attempts that were made to lure me into society. Amongst those who were the earliest to pay me the compliment of calling on me at Stetchworth House was Mr. Aubrey; but he was not admitted, for I had given especial directions to my porter to remember that I was not at home to him; and for more than six weeks of the five months I remained in London, I was fortunate enough to escape the pain of exchanging words with him. Once, indeed, I saw him in Piccadilly as I was returning from a drive in the Park, and I then responded to his cordial bow with a distant recognition. He was on foot, and, ere I had time to think twice of his greeting and my return to it, my horses had carried me out of his sight.

But five days after that event, it was my ill-luck to meet him when I had not the same advantage over him. I was in my carriage—an open one—waiting, with my daughter seated by my side, near Kensington Gardens,

for a friend whom we had appointed to meet there, when John Aubrey, mounted on a superb horse, reined up by the side of my phaeton, and addressed me with that stolid assurance which a long life of intrigue had made him a consummate master of. He was at least seventy years of age (I numbered more than fifty), but, apart from the whiteness of his hair, nothing in his aspect warranted one in terming him an old man. His well-knit and sinewy frame had lost nothing of its vigour or comeliness; there were wrinkles in his face, but it had lost the sinister expression which was habitual to it in the prime of manhood, and its features, instead of having less, had more than their former firmness and strength of outline. His eyes, too, always keenly searching, glowed with a fire that contrasted somewhat unpleasantly with his grey hair, and alone convinced me that his was not a constitution to find life barren and unprofitable at three score years and ten. The high-bred and docile creature on which he was mounted stood

still as a cast-iron statue immediately the bridle-rein fell loose on its neck, and it never stirred, save now and then to prick its ears or champ the smooth snaffle in its mouth, whilst its owner leaned forward with the ease of a youngster, till his body was fairly in my carriage, and said to me deliberately :—

"I congratulate London, Lady Ufford, on once more seeing you in it, and I sincerely trust the report that you intend to resume your old place in the world is a correct one. I called some weeks since at Stetchworth House to tender you my sincere homage, but I was not so fortunate as to find you at home."

"I remember; you did call. But it is for *me*, not for *you*, to be offering congratulations. I see by this morning's paper that the Ministry have offered you a baronetcy."

"And in this evening's journals you will learn that I have declined the dubious honour of such a rank."

"Indeed!"

"Surely you are not surprised?"

"No—I have outlived that sensation."

"Then you will not be astonished at what I now say," he returned, dropping his voice so that the servants should not hear, "when I charge you with great injustice and ingratitude to me. You ought not to treat an old friend as you have treated me. You are still young, and capable of forming new attachments, but an old man with a white head cannot make fresh associations. If the companions of his fresher years throw him over, he has to live alone—and 'tisn't every one whose conscience is easy enough for solitude. No, Lady Ufford, you didn't act as your husband would have done, when you ordered me to be turned away from your doors like a troublesome creditor."

"What do you want with me, man?" I answered in a whisper, but flashing my eyes at him fiercely.

"Only half an hour's chat with you *tête-à-tête*," he answered playfully. "What a boon

to sue for in this humble strain! Why, you have accorded more, since your return to London, to less sincere friends than I am. Come, let me see you at three to-morrow."

I would have resented his impertinent intrusion on me, and I was debating which out of half-a-dozen sarcasms that occurred to me I should use for his discomfiture; but he threw such a singular intonation, such significance and startling emphasis, into his concluding words, that I required no further assurance that he had a strong reason for wishing to see me in private, and that I should be guilty of folly, as well as inexcusable incivility, in refusing to grant him his request.

"Then, till three o'clock to-morrow, farewell. I shall be happy to see you."

He raised his eyebrows slightly, as if amused with the sudden change of my mind, and, having kissed his hand to me, and bade a laughing adieu to Caroline, who, timid and frightened by the conversation of which she

had been an auditor, had shrunk back into a corner of the carriage, he cantered briskly away.

The next day he appeared in Stetchworth House, punctual to the appointed hour. I was waiting for his arrival and heard him cross the hall; and the lightness and firmness of his step struck me whilst I listened. He was easy and unembarrassed; he rallied me on my long retirement in the country, and once more congratulated me on having wisely determined to change my plan of life; he inquired particularly for Caroline's health, and what progress she had made in her education;—would she sing well?—had she good execution on the piano?—and had she my remarkable gift for acquiring languages?—was she clever with her pencil? I must not, he said, be surprised at, or offended with, his curiosity; he was an old man, and had the right of old friendship to talk familiarly with me about my child. He was minute, too, in his inquiries about my country pursuits, and

about Braden Manor. But he was quite as communicative about his own affairs as he wished me to be about mine. He told me he was desirous of breaking off his connection with the political world, and he would do so as soon as he had wrung from the Ministry the object of his ambition. He, like all other *parvenus*, was dazzled (he acknowledged) with the thought of being called "My Lord," and had set his heart on an Irish peerage; he was not a strong enough man to command a place amongst the Peers of the Realm, but he believed he should rank amongst those of Ireland before he was two years older. He was diffuse also in his explanations to me of the causes which prevented Austria from raising a fresh loan in the City, and on the beauties and conveniences of a suburban villa which he had purchased and was fitting up at Fulham.

"But," said I, with a great effort, when this general chat had lasted for more than an hour, "you may not forget business. Had

you not some especial reason for wishing to see me to-day?"

"Oh," he answered quietly, folding his hands and regarding me with an indescribable expression of complacency and conscious power, that caused me to fear him as I had never before feared living man, "you need not have reminded me; I never forget anything. Yes, I had a good cause for compelling you to receive me. I want you to accompany me for a drive to-morrow morning to Epping Forest. I do not *ask* you to consent to my request, as if you would confer an obligation on me by doing so; but I simply *state my wish*, and add that you will not be consulting well for your interests if you oppose it."

"Indeed! But where?—for what purpose?—to see whom do you wish me to join you?"

"To see a person who is an old friend of mine, and who once had the honour of being numbered amongst your most intimate friends also. He is an old and feeble man.

(We none of us are so strong and light-hearted as we were twenty years or thirty years since. Even you, Lady Ufford, have lost something of the grace and incomparable loveliness of the girl who married Charles Millicent.) His mind, too, is not so strong as it was. He is not an agreeable companion, for successive attacks of paralysis have so shattered his intellect and disabled his frame, that he is scarcely to be called a reasonable human creature. Still I wish you would visit him, for possibly your presence, even for a few minutes, might comfort him in these his last days, which are fast drawing to a close, and I feel confident that you would repent hereafter not having visited him. Apart from these considerations, I have also, it is needless for me to remark, my own reasons for requesting that you join me in this excursion."

"Who is this man—this friend of yours and mine?" I asked, in a voice scarcely more audible than my breath.

"His name is North," he answered drily, speaking with such torturing deliberation that he seemed to take minutes to utter one short sentence. "At least he is called Mr. North in the house where he resides. And I think, Lady Ufford, that we had better always speak of him as 'Mr. North.' By your countenance I see you assent. I will, then, take my leave of you for to-day, but I shall be here to-morrow morning as early as twelve o'clock with my own carriage, which perhaps you will honour me by taking a seat in. Your panels and livery would be too conspicuous and attract too much observance for our purpose."

I answered nothing. A faintness and dim sense of horror overspread me; and, though I possibly remained calm and composed as far as external signs were concerned, I was for many minutes half bereft of consciousness. I knew that John Aubrey rose from the seat which he had occupied, and, approaching me, raised my right hand to his lips and saluted

it; I was aware of submitting to this insult, and of my hand falling down again by my side like a lump of lead; I saw him move noiselessly over the carpet of the room, and turn, ere the door closed upon him, to bow and smile to me once more; and then I fell back upon the sofa, on which I had sat throughout this interview, and was dead to myself and all the world besides, till I heard a whispered babble of voices around me, and the hushed murmurs of affectionate watchers, and slowly opening my eyes I saw my beautiful child bending over me, and was gratified by the silver earnestness of her inquiry,—

"Mamma, dear darling mamma, are you better now?"

I recovered my self-command; and after a night of tranquil sleep, mercifully bestowed on me by that thrice-blessed drug, opium, I was prepared to make the drive to Epping Forest. My indisposition of the previous day I made light of to my household, and I almost succeeded in persuading Caroline that

it was nothing but a trifling inconvenience caused by the atmosphere. At twelve, Mr. Aubrey was announced, and I received him in the presence of my child, so as to spare myself the embarrassment of replying to his first greeting without a witness.

There was no reason for delay. I was already equipped for the excursion when he entered; and ere three minutes had elapsed I was closeted with John Aubrey, in his dark-green chariot, and was proceeding at a rapid pace through an endless labyrinth of obscure and dingy thoroughfares, which my companion had ordered his coachman to make his line of route, for the sake of avoiding the quarters where I should run most risk of being recognised, and also of keeping away from the densely crowded streets of "the City," in the traffic of which we might be locked, and our progress inconveniently retarded.

During our drive we spoke little. John Aubrey never liked talking unless he could talk with effect, a proceeding which the noise

of our wheels over the stones rendered it impossible for him just then to accomplish; and I had no wish to exchange thoughts with him. He took occasion, however, to explain to me, on the way, that the house we were about to visit was a private lunatic asylum, and that Mr. North had resided in it for at least sixteen years, under the benevolent care of Dr. Marsham, the resident physician and proprietor of the establishment. Much to my satisfaction, the coachman had been ordered to drive with all the speed that safety would permit of his using; and, as Mr. Aubrey's carriage-horses were powerful high-bred creatures, with unusually free action, we were little more than an hour in performing the journey. Indeed, I was agreeably startled by learning the rapidity with which we had been travelling, when, after having cleared the extreme suburbs of the East by about three miles, we turned sharply out of the high road, and having proceeded a few hundred yards along a retired lane, shot through the dark umbrage of

an extensive plantation, and emerged from it into a small, but elegantly-planted, park that contained a compact and almost imposing mansion.

"That is Dr. Marsham's house," curtly explained my companion, and in another minute the carriage stopped, and we alighted at the door of the asylum.

The doctor had been prepared for our visit, and received us in his drawing-room with an excess of politeness and sympathy. I kept my thick veil drawn in double folds over my face, and responded to his numerous attempts to lead me into conversation by curt and formal replies. But my companion relieved me of all the difficulty of speaking by keeping up a continuous flow of useful falsehood and polite commonplace. He introduced me to the doctor as Mrs. Armitage, and explained to him that I was a family connexion of his unfortunate patient, "Mr. North,"—and that, on learning the poor man had but a short time longer to drag out a wretched and utterly

deplorable state of existence, I had come, out of affection, to see him, though I was aware there was no hope of his ever again having the power to recognise me. The doctor listened to all this, and said it was very natural in me, and smiled again unctuously, and rubbed his hand,—and, I doubt not, in his own secret heart, did not believe ten words of the whole statement, but only wondered what on earth that Mrs. Armitage (or whatever else her name was) meant by keeping her veil drawn over her face so closely. I believe that physicians, though they are rather a loquacious race of men, do not speak the truth oftener than their neighbours.

In a few minutes Dr. Marsham rang the bell, and learnt from a lacquey, who answered it, that "poor Mr. North" was quite ready to "receive his visitors;" and the doctor rose with officious urbanity to do the duties of his house, and conduct us to "poor Mr. North's" bedside. But Mr. Aubrey, quietly, but with a peremptory composure, which it was impos-

sible for ordinary men to resist, declined to profit by his politeness, and, saying that he was familiar with the geography of the house, and knew well his way to his "poor friend's" rooms, led me off. The servant preceded us a few paces to show the way, but Mr. Aubrey dismissed him as easily as he had secured me from the annoyance of the doctor's company, and, drawing my hand through his arm, led me up a spacious staircase, and down the entire length of two long galleries, when he paused and tapped lightly at a door. A nurse, respectably attired and of pleasant appearance and manners, answered the summons, and admitted us to a comfortable and luxuriously-furnished sitting-room, with a door on the opposite side leading to an interior apartment.

"He is sinking, sir," observed the nurse, addressing herself to us, without waiting to be questioned, "and has been for the last two days. He wont be here longer than to-morrow, poor gentleman! And, sir, it was

only the day before yesterday he roused himself from the silence which he had kept in for weeks, and talked quite rational. He seemed almost like a little child, and nothing would suit him but putting his hands together, and placing them clasped in mine, and saying just such prayers as I was taught to say when I was a child."

As the nurse said this simply, she wiped her glistening eyes with the corner of an apron, and then proceeded—"But he knows nothing and says nothing now."

We listened to her kindly report of her patient's conduct and state for a short time; and then John Aubrey, motioning to her to remain where she was, led me into the inner room, and closed the door behind us. We were in a large and cheerful bed-room, furnished on the same scale of expensive comfort as the sitting-room, and we stood before a pretty French bed, on which lay, heavily breathing, the dying man. He was an aged, toil-worn wretch. Scant grey hair covered his

head; and deep lines and furrows had, by time, and suffering, and sin, been ploughed in his pale, shrunk face. His features and countenance had once been far different, but they retained, notwithstanding all their scarred and shrivelled deformity, so much of their original aspect that I knew them the instant my eyes fell on them.

He was dozing in the heaviness of stupor, when John Aubrey drew closer to me, and in a low, harsh, hateful voice, but with something of the business-like calmness of a showman exhibiting a wild beast, observed:—

"Poor Mr. North has been in this house and under my protection for more than sixteen years. During that time his mind has been the victim of innumerable delusions, and he has passed through various phases of that insanity which is hereditary in his family, but fortunately he has never at any period of his long affliction revealed any secret which I, or you, Mrs. Armitage, had rather should not come to light. Dr. Marsham has treated him

with all possible kindness and skill, and the condition of the unfortunate man has been rendered as little painful for him to bear, and for us to reflect upon, as humanity and prudence could make it."

The showman was still speaking, when Mr. North opened his eyes, and looked with a vacant, wandering stare at us, at my dark form and veiled head, and at triumphant John Aubrey standing by my side. Then the poor wasted, dying man let his gaze fall from us, and he began to mutter incoherently words that had a fearful significance to me:—

"Ship—ship—will the ship never reach land! There can't—be danger. No, no danger. I can't—I wont be drowned. And there are so many—many of us. So horrible! A convict ship lost! No, no!—I haven't done worse than others. Why should I—be called a rogue?—Watson—Stephen Watson—you plotting, damned villain! It was you—you—you—who ruined me. Poor Rawleigh! noble Rawleigh!—Miriam—pardon—I was

mad—and I am—am—mad. Miriam, I never loved anyone but you. No—she wont come."

I was advancing to bend over him, and put my lips to his forehead, to call him by his right name, to pour upon his deadened nerves of hearing the music of old words of endearment, to fan with long-forgotten sounds of tender mystery the last faint sparks of reason, to catch one parting smile of recognition, and, even though he should not comprehend my words, to assure him of my forgiveness. But John Aubrey's strong arm restrained me, and once again the dying man ceased from uttering his rambling, feeble, plaintive cries, and relapsed into the stupor from which he had been momentarily roused.

"This is new," observed John Aubrey; "he has never wandered in this fashion before. Mrs. Armitage, you must return to town alone. I will not leave him till it is all over."

He acted on this prudent resolution. He led me from the chamber of horrors, through

the spacious sitting-room, down the long galleries and white staircase, and through the hall, where Dr. Marsham hovered about like a highly-educated butler, in a great state of anxiety to recommend himself to my good graces, in case I should ever want his professional services.

I returned to Stetchworth House by myself, and John Aubrey went back to Mr. North's bedside to perform the last offices of friendship.

That night, ere I retired to rest, a messenger left with my porter the following brief note, in the familiar hand-writing of John Aubrey:—

"Dear Lady Ufford—poor Mr. North is dead.—J. A."

## CHAPTER IX.

### EXTRICATION.

By the terrible secret that existed between us John Aubrey recovered his former power over me. My presence of mind and angry determination to thwart him disappeared; and, crushed with humiliation and fear, I trembled when he approached me, and cowered before his cunning, scrutinizing eyes. He resumed without delay his old habits of familiarity with me, entering my house whenever he liked, and addressing me with the same freedom as in the days when I was Mrs. Millicent. He established himself as a household companion to me, superintending, advising, and criticising

all my plans and operations. To my child he assumed a paternal air of protection that was intensely irritating to me to witness, and he did not hesitate to call in question the merits of the education she was, under my directions, receiving. He abstained from alluding to the frightful life-drama in which we had performed important parts. Instead of recounting to me the particulars of Mr. North's last moments, or the events which had combined to restore him from a convict-settlement in Australia to his native land, and there to consign him, entirely bereft of reason, to a madhouse, he maintained a dogged silence on all that related to that wretched person. But, though he studiously avoided that subject in his frequent and lengthy conversations with me, he knew that it was the one engrossing topic to which my mind was ever turned. He both knew this, and found enjoyment in the knowledge. It was a triumph to him to see my cheek turn pale and my lip quiver at his approach, and to assure himself that, proud, prosperous, and powerful as the

world thought me, I trembled lest he should, in a vindictive moment, proclaim the story of my shame, and bring dishonour on me, and ignominy on my child.

He was relentless and unwearying in his persecutions. He would not let me rest for scarce a day together. He called on me at moments when I the least expected him, sometimes appearing before me at my breakfast-table, and frequently sliding stealthily through the passages of Stetchworth House when the evening was far advanced, and the members of my quiet family were thinking of retiring to rest. The man haunted me, and proclaimed by the repeated insult of his presence that it was his intention to have no mercy on me. He was as collected, cheerful, active, and brilliant in address as ever. Never was he without something fresh on his lips; he talked poetry, art, politics, scandal, everything —except the one thing that I dared not mention to him. I remembered the part that I had acted to his toy-wife, Geraldine, how I

had held her in a bondage not less cruel than that which he now manifestly purposed keeping me in!—how I had crossed her threshold, unbidden, unwelcome, hated, even as her husband now crossed mine!—and my heart smote me for the cruelty I had been guilty of towards her.

"Caroline is a lovely child," observed my persecutor to me one morning, just as my darling left the room where we had been sitting, and closed the door behind her. "Indeed, she is fast growing into a woman. 'Tis ridiculous to speak of her as a child. Soon we shall have to look out for a husband for her."

"*We?*"

"Her father—my poor friend and patron, Lord Ufford," he continued coolly, not noticing my indignant interjection, "as you are doubtless aware, conceived a romantic wish to see her the bride of her cousin Reginald, my Lord Ufford that is to be. And, really, I do not see why it would be a bad arrangement."

"I think, Mr. Aubrey," I observed, in a voice that betrayed my impotent rage, "that this is a subject we had better not discuss. When my daughter has arrived at a fit age, and when I wish to see her married, it will be time enough for me to decide on what I think a suitable match for her."

"Quite time enough," he blandly assented; but there was a light in his malicious eyes that told me the wicked thoughts of his heart.

On that occasion, however, he said no more; but, having bowed ceremoniously to me, and gazed steadily at me whilst doing so, he took his departure, leaving me to my reflections. That morning I thought again of Geraldine, and the barbarous sway I had held over her. I recalled every incident of our long contest—her success at first, and utter defeat at last. The vision of her lovely face, radiant as it was when I first saw it, and the vision of her desolate face, pale and emaciated and gloomy as it was ere I kissed it for the last time, rose before me, and suggested

thoughts (that made me shudder) and fancies concerning that awful power which had removed her from the misery of her troubled lot here. I repeated the words of her last short note to me,—"Forgive me, even as I have forgiven you;" and I started as it seemed to me that I heard my own voice saying to the bearer of that note,—"John Aubrey, she was your victim and mine, but now she is stronger than either of us." And then it came into my head that it would be well if death once more intervened, and removed contention from the earth; that it would be well if I composed myself for my rest, and went that "downward way" to the silence that had long since enfolded my adversary.

This terrible imagination grew upon me, and I forthwith fell into a reverie begotten of despair. All the forms of death that I had ever witnessed, or heard of, or read about, flitted before me. Deathbeds where the young and pure had been taken into the arms

of angels, as they slept with tranquil smiles on their quiet faces; battle-fields littered with the ghastly trail of glory; the marble stillness of my husband's face, ere I kissed it for the last time and placed the violets beside it; deeds of violence such as enliven the annals of brigandage; and murders by steel and poison. Then the memory of the crime which a wretched child, reared in vice and cruelty, had perpetrated altogether in will, and almost in deed, years ago in the chamber of a lonely farm-house, flashed upon me. Satan knows why he put such dangerous thoughts into my head! I deliberated how I could destroy myself with the greatest chance of escaping the ignominy that attaches to the suicide, and with the fullest security that my child would not have her after-days clouded by the reflection that her mother sought destruction and found it by her own hand.

Some years before, I had studied chemistry under the guidance of Lord Ufford, and had paid considerable attention to that fascinating

department of practical chemistry, the preparation of deadly and subtle poisons. I had laid aside the books and apparatus which this study induced me to purchase, and I had not expended a single thought on them for years; but now by some evil agency they were suggested to my mind, and I recalled to my recollection a cabinet of chemicals which I possessed securely locked in a private closet at Braden. This cabinet was scarce bigger than a large workbox, but it contained substances endowed with fearful properties. Amongst its treasures, it now occurred to me, there was one small glass tube, about an inch and a-quarter in length, and not more than a-fifth of an inch in diameter. This small tube was closed at both ends by a blow-pipe. It was a small vase, scarce bigger than the glass tubes in which pencil-leads are kept; but it was a vial of destruction, and held within its frail crystal wall the means of surpassing the mercy of Jaffa. It contained Chloride of Kakodyl. My memory was so quickened that I was

enabled to trace up the production of this deadly preparation from ingredients which every druggist in the kingdom is in the daily habit of vending to his casual customers for a few pence. Mentally I performed all the operations of the Laboratory. I combined Acetic Acid with Potash, and formed Acetate of Potash; I distilled this Acetate of Potash from a retort containing Arsenious Acid, and so procured the foul, fetid Oxide of Kakodyl; I combined this Oxide of Kakodyl with Corrosive Sublimate; and, having mingled the crystalline product with Hydrochloric Acid, I obtained by distillation the deadly Chloride of Kakodyl contained in my small glass tube. I pondered how, if I took that small glass tube, and put it on the floor, and crushed it beneath my foot, I could grind the tiny vessel into a fine white dust, that would escape the eye of the most careful observer; and I mused how, if I so destroyed the case, its deadly contents, with a slight explosion, would rise, in noxious vapour, from the ground, and instantaneously I, and all who breathed

the subtly-poisoned air (all, ay, even if the room contained a score) would be seized with numbness and syncope, and, ere sixty tickings of a watch had shocked the silence, would be dead. Was there not here a means whereby I could escape the horrors that impended, and were daily, even hourly, pressing down closer and closer upon me? No one would suspect how the catastrophe had been effected. I should be found, one morning, reclining on the sofa, in my private room, in my last, passionless sleep; my countenance would be calm and peaceful, disfigured by no livid hue or sign of violence; through the open window, the fatal vapour would have ascended into the fresh, pure air of a summer morning, powerless to work aught of injury to the dewy lawns, and still trees, and serene firmament. No instrument of death would be seen or suspected; no trace left of the machinery that had wrought the disaster, save one scant grain of almost impalpable powder, the sole remains of the crushed glass bubble.

This terrible imagination grew upon me, and gained an ascendancy over my mind, that made me shudder with a ghastly presentiment of fast-approaching destruction, as my better self looked in upon and examined the worse elements of my nature, now working actively within me and impelling me to one great concluding crime. By night and by day, in the hours of solitary darkness that I spent on my bed, and in the merry sunlight, as I drove amidst the gay crowds of the park, this vision haunted me, and all the steps necessary to make it take form and effect in the actual drama of existence, and all the consequences, appalling by their vastness, or fascinating by their minuteness, flitted in never-resting phantasmagoria over my brain.

"I am going into the country," I said to John Aubrey, at the commencement of June. "I can bear London no longer, and will return at the commencement of next week to the seclusion and quiet of Braden."

"I applaud your resolution, Lady Ufford,"

he answered, assuming an air of more cordiality than usual. "You are evidently unwell. You are pale, nervous, harassed, unstrung. The excitement and strife of London does not suit you; and you are sorely in need of repose and quiet. Caroline, too, pines for the fresh air of the country."

"She does, poor girl!"

"I cannot leave London at present, for this is just the busiest time of my year. But by the commencement of August I trust I shall be able to join you at Braden, and stay with you for two or three months."

"John Aubrey," I said slowly, "why do you persevere in this cruel persecution of me? Why persist in forcing yourself on my society, when you know that your presence is hateful to me?"

"Because I entertain, perhaps foolishly, a hope that you will, by constant intercourse with me, be induced to lay aside your strong sentiment of dislike to me. I am aware that you cherish a strong repugnance to me, and

I cannot say that I am surprised you entertain this feeling, but it shall be the one object of my life to overcome it,—to win you to a better understanding of me, and a juster appreciation of my life-long attachment to you. Possibly you are of opinion that I have arrived at a time of life when it behoves me to lay aside hope, and even to prepare myself for the relinquishment of the feebler enjoyments of retrospection. But, Lady Ufford, I am endowed with one of those felicitous constitutions which, in their physical and intellectual and moral characteristics, altogether defy ordinary rules of criticism. It is true I am three score years and ten, but my health is so vigorous, and my body so nervous and sinewy and elastic, that I need only six hours' sleep in every four-and-twenty, and I enjoy a day with the hounds as much as I did thirty years since. My eye-sight is clear, and my hearing good; my brain is still so active, and has such freshness of spring that, if the capitalists of Europe want a new scheme for a loan

originated, they compete among themselves for my good counsels; and though my locks may be white and dry with age, my heart is green and young. Surely then, I am not to be called 'old'?"

He uttered this with an indescribable tone of subdued exultation, as if he mischievously revelled within himself at the prospect he still had of many years of wickedness, and as if he maliciously wished to disabuse me of any fond hopes I might entertain, that the course of a few years would free me from his tyranny.

"Then why may I not hope?" he asked, peering curiously into my eyes.

"I do not forbid you to hope," I answered.

"Then you understand me," he rejoined quickly, "and permit me to trust that in time you may lay aside that distrust and ill-will which you have so unjustly conceived towards me, and that, taking large and charitable views of all the different acts of my life, you will endeavour to dismiss your animosity to-

wards me, and take into its place tenderness and affection."

My lips did not reply to this astounding speech; but a flash of indignation and withering rage and horror crossed my countenance, as the hideous purpose of the man suddenly burst upon me, and he read in that quick look an answer such as no words of mine could have framed.

"And is this, then, too great a presumption? Does the man who has loved you for two-thirds of your life, who has twice seen you married to other men, who has served you with chivalric fidelity in every period of your changeful career, who has guarded your reputation from the calumnies of others when it was in his power utterly to blast it, who guarded for years in his own breast—not even communicating it to you—the secret on which depended all the happiness of that married life, which in your calm reflection you hold as ample compensation for all the pains and trials of your existence, who still guards that secret which,

if it were proclaimed to the world, would convert you in public esteem from an honoured woman of rank into a thrice dishonoured woman of shame, and would draw scorn—undying scorn—upon your fair, lovely, golden-haired child,—*his* child and yours:—is it too much, I say, for such a one to hope that in his old age he may win for wife the woman he has loved for a generation, when she has lost the young glories of her beauty, and can at best only offer him a shattered and unloving heart?"

His eyes flashed as he said this, and the muscles of his thin face twitched, as he waited patiently for my answer. But no answer came, for consternation and fury at the insult I had received deprived me of the power to speak, or decide in what manner I ought to reply. He saw how overpowered I was; and, thinking perhaps that he had made too abrupt and too violent a revelation of his feelings, he moderated his tone as he said:—

"Lady Ufford, if I have alarmed you,

and pressed too rudely upon tender points, you must pardon me out of consideration of the control I have exercised over myself, in all things relating to you, for many years. I will now leave you. I advise you to act on your resolution of going into the country, and I sincerely trust that you will in the repose and stillness of Braden soon be perfectly restored to health. In August I will visit you there, and I will still hope that you will then receive me in an altered state of feeling, and give me the one assurance which I supplicate from your lips.—Till August, I will not intrude myself upon you."

I returned to the fair uplands and beloved terraces of Braden,—but with what a changed nature! and with what terrible visions and speculations and resolves, destroying all the pure life and noble purposes of my heart! Every bad element of my being, implanted in it by the evil of my progenitors, or sown there by the cruel ex-

periences of my childhood; every vice, and unruly passion, and hateful tendency, that I had done my best to overcome and eradicate, and that, lulled by the soporific effect of favourable circumstances, had for years lain dormant amidst my dimly guessed-at energies and capabilities, awoke with increased powers, and tore my soul, as they unceasingly battled with the good of my nature, and with each other. There was no longer any music in the trickling fountains, or beauty in the bright terraces, or peace under the branches of the dark, ragged cedars! The deer stood still and motionless in the park; and though the blue firmament seemed to press against the trees, the cries of the water-fowl never seemed to reach it.

Caroline saw the grief of my soul, and tried to comfort me, little knowing, poor child, that the sound of her silver-voiced tenderness, and the sight of her watchful, wondering, blue eyes, and of her tresses of sunny gold, were daggers to my heart.

July passed away. In August John Aubrey visited me. Would he had never come! Would he had never come!—He was quiet, with his customary volubility, polite, sinister, watchful. In spirits and in health he had never been better. He drove and rode with me and Caroline, he read aloud to us, and exerted all his powers to make the change of his presence an agreeable one. He did not hastily approach the topic of our last conversation, before my quitting Stetchworth House —indeed, he allowed ten days to go over before he adverted to it; but, as soon as he spoke again on that subject, I found he had bated nothing of his cruel, merciless purpose. I argued, but he vanquished me; I implored him to have mercy, and he was deaf; I tried by artifice to put him off with vague replies, to procrastinate, to gain time, but he was not to be driven or cajoled from his point; I appealed to his commiseration in the name of my child, and he answered with a husky, mocking laugh:—

"Ay, think of your child! You cannot do better than think of her."

As the contest proceeded, we gradually laid aside the affectations of love and honour, which at first we both professed to have, and to believe we each had for each other; we no longer spoke of "affection," and "gratitude," and "esteem," but "profit," and "loss," and "interest;" and we fought on with sarcasms, and entreaties, and threats, making clutches at our "cupidity," and "fear," and "thirst for vengeance," just as two gladiators in their prolonged struggle would each try to win an advantage from the other's "shortness of limb," or "want of science," or "lack of strength."

At last the fight was terminated.

By appointment I went shortly after midnight to give him my final decision, in a sitting-room at the end of the South Gallery, which had been set apart for his private use during such time as he should be a guest in my house. I found him in the dark-wainscotted

and spacious room, busily engaged at the large writing-table, at which, in a massive, ponderous oak chair, he was in the habit of writing. A lamp was before him, and on either side of him was a pile of letters. It was a warm, moonlight night, and I saw to my satisfaction that one of the windows had been drawn half-way down to admit the cool air from the park.

"Lady Ufford," he said, rising, and placing a chair for me, "I thank you for again putting this confidence in me and again coming to my private room, after all your family have retired to rest. Miriam, are you come to tell me in your goodness that you consent?"

"I have come, Mr. Aubrey," I answered slowly and with emphasis, "to say that I will never be your wife. I have weighed well the consequences of this refusal. I shall lose some of the world's esteem,—*that* I do not care for, —and I shall earn some of the world's commiseration—*that* I shall smart under! My daughter is already betrothed to Reginald

Ufford, and as his wife she will have more than that rank which her birth is supposed to entitle her to. At least, she will have her beauty, her rare mental endowments, and the noble fortune which my lord entrusted to me to keep for her use and dignity. This is my decision, Mr. Aubrey, and by acting on it I am convinced I shall do the best for my child. You can blacken my name, and throw a cloud over my child's happiness; and if it should please you to do so I would not hinder you. — Mr. Aubrey, from to-night we are strangers."

"You need not flatter yourself I shall fail to take my vengeance," he said hoarsely.

"I don't so flatter myself. I know you too well."

"Hardly," he replied. "You think that I for a man am made of much the same stuff as you are for a woman. But you are mistaken. In some respects our careers have been alike. We have both known changes of fortune, and have risen from poverty

and misery to wealth and what fools think happiness. But in the means by which this was effected we differ. Throughout your course you have been the creature of accident. By accident you failed to kill your first mistress, by accident you came into the service of Lady Clayton, by accident you fell into the late Lord Ufford's path, by accident you drifted a second time in the way of Charles Millicent and married him, by accident you married Lord Ufford whilst your former husband was still alive. These were the *accidents* of your career—that is, the results of an influence which, without your being aware of it, was acting on your existence. Such are *the accidents* of mere puppets, and such was *your* course. But my course for forty years has been one of *design*, and the parent of your *accidents*. I have done my pleasure, throughout life, with you and all you have come in contact with. I caused my master to get his cousin, Lady Clayton, to take you into Laburnum Cottage; I caused you to be educated like a lady;

when I afterwards found you the servant of the girl I was engaged to be married to, it was *my* design, *my* manœuvering that got you falsely condemned of theft and sent to prison; when Lord Ufford had just taken the whim into his head to marry you, and employed me to search for you, I knew well where you were, but it was *my plan* that you should marry Charles Millicent. When that poor wretch had played his part long enough in London to answer my purpose, I led him into the extravagances and crimes which resulted in his transportation. In due course I re-conveyed him to this country a shattered imbecile, and fabricated the story of his death; it was *through me* that Lord Ufford married you when he did; and on my at length revealing to him the secret of his shame, and your infamy, and his child's disgrace, it was *through me* that he died broken-hearted.—Miriam, *Lady* Ufford!" he concluded, laying an emphasis of vulgar insult on my title, be assured you will rue this night. I have been prepared for this final overthrow

of my wishes, and long ago I decided how I would act if it ever came upon me. You are mistaken if you think that child of yours shall ever be Lady Ufford. This night I will write to the poor, old, crazed, fantastic lord; and ere the world shall go to rest to-morrow, I will trumpet forth to it your degradation."

As he ceased speaking, he glanced at his writing-desk, as if he wished to resume the labours of correspondence. I bowed to him, and retired from the room, walking slowly round the writing-table, between it and the heavy oak chair which John Aubrey had pushed back, when he rose to receive me.

Averting my face, and not looking at him, I quitted the apartment and closed the door carefully behind me.

Early the next morning I was summoned from my room by a noise of consternation in my house. I came out from my private chamber to the West Gallery, and a servant, running up to me, hastily informed me that Mr. Aubrey had not entered his bed-room on the

previous night, and that his servant, on entering his sitting-apartment in the South Gallery, a few instants since, had found him seated in the large oak-chair at the writing-table—dead! —his arms and body extended and fallen forwards upon the desk!

Swiftly I ran round the corridors to the South Gallery and entered the chamber in which my guest had expired. It was full of horror-struck servants; but that which *even I* could not have gazed on with self-possession had been already removed to another room. Everything in the apartment was just as I had left it on the previous night; the open window, the blinds drawn up, and the two piles of letters on the writing-table. No; there was the commencement of another letter—"My dear Lord, I am an old man, and I think it my duty—" The dead man had proceeded no further with his letter to "the poor, old, crazed, fantastic lord."

I replaced the sheet containing these "last words" back upon the table, and, stooping down, I observed under the table on the floor-

cloth, on which the dead man's feet had rested whilst writing his letters, some fine white powder, scarce enough to cover the end of a pocket-knife. I did not care to examine it. The fine white dust was caused by John Aubrey having crushed beneath his boot a piece of fragile fine-blown glass.

With a whisk of the skirt of my dress I sent the minute atoms in all directions, to fly for a second in the air, and then to settle down, in no way distinguishable from other dust, on the whole extent of the floor-cloth, and the soft worsted of the Turkey carpet.

Oh, that with the same ease we could wipe out the traces and the consequences of all our wicked acts!

THE END.

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Reader! be charitable in your judgment of me. If you are a woman, remember that I was a mother, and loved my child better than myself. If you are a man, be generous, and,

reflecting how nearly all the good and evil of your nature can be regarded only as the result of causes set in operation long ere you were able either to control or consent to them, be thankful if your first days were spent under healthy influences; and, meditate on the deep wisdom that lies embalmed in the poet's words :—

> "The boy is father to the man,
> And I would wish my days to be
> Each linked to each in natural piety."

VALE.

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